

# FRONTEX



**Risk Analysis  
for 2023/2024**



**FRONT****X**

**Risk Analysis  
for 2023/2024**

# FRONTEx

Plac Europejski 6, 00-844 Warsaw, Poland  
T +48 22 205 95 00  
F +48 22 205 95 01  
frontex@frontex.europa.eu  
[www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu)

Warsaw, August 2023

Cover photo: © Frontex 2022. All rights reserved.

FPI 23.5017

Print:

TT-AC-23-002-EN-C  
ISBN 978-92-9467-894-2  
ISSN 1977-4451  
doi.10.2819/62842

PDF:

TT-AC-23-002-EN-N  
ISBN 978-92-9467-893-5  
ISSN 1977-446X  
doi.10.2819/920282

## DISCLAIMERS

This publication or its contents do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Frontex concerning the legal status of any country, territory or city or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

All maps and charts included in this report are the sole property of Frontex and any unauthorised use is prohibited. Frontex disclaims any liability with respect to the boundaries, names and designations used on the maps.

Throughout the report, references to Kosovo\* are marked with an asterisk to indicate that this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The term “illegal border-crossing” used throughout the report refers to cases of crossings of the external borders of the EU considered unauthorised at the time of the crossing under the Schengen Borders Code. This number might include persons intending to apply for asylum. The term refers to statistical data of events occurring at the border and does not presume the final legal status of the detected persons.

## SOURCE MATERIAL

Insights on the development of the risks described in this document are based upon monthly statistics exchanged among Member States within the framework of the Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN). The annex provides a full overview and breakdowns of the indicators which the Agency collects. In particular, for cross-border crime analysis, EUROSUR incident reports were considered, alongside a dedicated “Request for Information” (RFI). The analysis of secondary movements incorporates asylum information provided by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), and returns data has recently been collected via the Return Data Collection (RDC).

Member States were not requested to answer specific questions in support of this analysis. Rather, bimonthly analytical reports and incident reports from Member States routinely collected by the Agency, as well as other Member States’ contributions submitted in 2022, were used, especially as regards analysis of routes and *modi operandi*. Intelligence derived from debriefing activities carried out within Joint Operations was also analysed.

Open-source information was used, especially in identifying the main ‘push and pull factors’ for irregular migration to the EU. These sources included reports issued by government agencies, international and non-governmental organisations, as well as mainstream news agencies and EU bodies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the preparation of the *Risk Analysis for 2023/2024*, Frontex has been able to draw on a wide range of information provided by Member States, third countries and partner agencies.

The Agency would like to express its gratitude to all Member States’ representatives in its Risk Analysis Network and third country partners for their efforts in providing data and analysis, as well as Europol and the EUAA, and all colleagues involved in the preparation of this report.

# Table of contents

**Foreword** 7

**Executive summary** 9

**Introduction** 10

**Irregular Migration** 13

Irregular migration at the sea borders 14

Irregular migration at the land borders 16

Clandestine entry 18

Document fraud 20

**Secondary Movements>Returns** 23

Secondary movements 24

Risks to returns 26

**Cross-Border Crime** 29

Smuggling of illicit drugs 30

Firearms smuggling 32

Detection of stolen vehicles and parts 34

Tobacco smuggling 36

Trafficking in human beings 38

Terrorism 40

**Outlook** 42

**Statistical annex** 44



## List of acronyms used

<b>BCP</b>	border-crossing point
<b>CIRAM</b>	Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model
<b>EBCG</b>	European Border and Coast Guard
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EDF</b>	European Union Document-Fraud
<b>EDF-RAN</b>	European Union Document-Fraud Risk Analysis Network
<b>EIBM</b>	European integrated border management
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUAA</b>	European Union Agency for Asylum
<b>eu-LISA</b>	European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
<b>Eurodac</b>	European Dactyloscopy
<b>Europol</b>	EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (formerly European Police Office)
<b>Eurostat</b>	Statistical Office of the European Union
<b>FRAN</b>	Frontex Risk Analysis Network
<b>Frontex</b>	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
<b>FTF</b>	Foreign Terrorist Fighter
<b>IBC</b>	Illegal border-crossing
<b>ICAO</b>	The International Civil Aviation Organization
<b>ID</b>	identification document
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>ISGS</b>	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>ISIS-K</b>	the ISIS faction Khorasan Province
<b>JNIM</b>	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin
<b>JO</b>	Joint Operation
<b>JORA</b>	Joint Operations Reporting Application
<b>MS</b>	EU Member States
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>OCC</b>	organised crime group
<b>RDC</b>	Return Data Collection
<b>SAC</b>	Schengen-Associated Countries
<b>SIS</b>	Schengen Information System
<b>THB</b>	trafficking in human beings
<b>UAM</b>	unaccompanied minor
<b>UK</b>	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>VIN</b>	Vehicle Identification Number
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



# Foreword

As we unveil the Annual Risk Analysis for 2023/2024, it is crucial to acknowledge the ever-evolving complexity and challenges we face at the external borders. The necessity for reliable, timely analysis has never been more critical than it is now, as the geopolitical landscape and migration patterns constantly transform, demanding our flexibility and adaptability.

This year's risk analysis in particular points to the Central Mediterranean as a region of heightened concern. With geopolitical instability and global challenges intensifying, we must remain vigilant and steadfast in our mission to protect Europe's borders while contributing to the prevention of further loss of life, especially at sea.

Moreover, the challenges related to cross-border crime underscore the necessity for creative approaches and enhanced cooperation. The resurgence of cross-border mobility, particularly in air travel following the COVID-19 pandemic, requires working relentlessly to strengthen our EU border management systems and prepare for future challenges and build the necessary capacities.

In the face of new and unprecedented challenges, it has become increasingly apparent that a strong, European cohesion is crucial. The ongoing war in

Ukraine, hostility from the Russian and Belarusian regimes, and ambivalence from other global players have placed European integrated border management (EIBM) in a turbulent geopolitical environment. These emerging threats, alongside the potential large-scale refugee outflows, underscore the necessity of cooperation and coordination among European nations.

Frontex plays a vital role in spearheading this cooperation, ensuring that we are prepared to successfully manage these challenges. By fostering collaboration and information sharing with Member States, Frontex can effectively coordinate resources, expertise, and efforts to address these complex issues. Our role in supporting search and rescue, combating cross-border crime, and facilitating effective returns of third-country nationals highlights the importance of a unified approach to managing Europe's external borders.

All stakeholders must come together and harness the insights provided by this risk analysis to proactively tackle the growing and emerging challenges at our borders. By uniting our efforts, we can ensure the safety, security, and stability of Europe and its citizens, ultimately safeguarding the values and ideals that define our continent.



To successfully navigate the new and unprecedented challenges we face, it is imperative that we continue to cultivate strong partnerships at the European level, utilising the full potential of Frontex as the linchpin of our collective efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters that appear to read 'H. Leijtens'.

**Hans Leijtens**  
Executive Director



# Executive summary

## Turbulent outlook calls for effective deployment of Standing Corps

As the war in Ukraine rages on and in the face of hostility from the Russian and Belarusian regimes as well as ambivalence from Asian powers and much of the global south, European integrated border management (EIBM) may face an even more turbulent, hostile geopolitical environment than in 2022. It is assessed as highly likely that disruptions to global security, food and energy supplies, together with macroeconomic factors in key countries of origin of irregular migration and cross-border crime will put the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCC) to the test. This risk analysis gives renewed urgency to the Multi-annual Strategic Policy for EIBM and to empower the EBCC Standing Corps to fulfil its full potential as the adaptive European capacity to respond to high and critical risks for EIBM such as crisis situations that it was conceived to be.

With somewhat less certainty but with potentially greater magnitude and impact, geopolitical instability in countries to the east and south of Europe may also result in large-scale refugee outflows. Despite the positive response to Ukrainian refugees in 2022, additional outflows could pose a severe challenge to the EU's capacity to host these populations and strain local people's willingness to help. More refugees could also funnel further business to people smugglers, whose operations already expanded in 2022.

## Rising cross-border crime and migrant smuggling require new remedies

The marked increase in detected irregular border-crossings in 2022 (+66% *vis-à-vis* 2021 to almost 332 000) coincides with an increase in facilitated movements, which is evidenced by a new record in the number of people smugglers detected (over 15 000 people smugglers

were reported to Frontex in 2022). Indeed Europol finds that “the market for migrant smuggling services to and within the EU is reaching new heights, fuelled by emerging and deepening crises, most notably economic recessions, environmental emergencies caused by climate change, as well as conflicts and demographic pressure in many origin countries”.<sup>1</sup> Beside the strengthened joint efforts to dismantle the business of people smugglers, other policies and approaches need to be devised to meaningfully curb irregular migration.

The last year has seen upswings in many areas of cross-border crime in a return to business-as-usual following the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short term, crime levels on the EU's external borders will likely continue to follow demand in established and emerging illicit markets. Criminal networks will adjust to new conditions and benefit from opportunities to smuggle various illicit or scarce commodities, including drugs. Adjustment of trafficking routes for drugs and firearms, online trade, encrypted communication, and a business-like approach will characterise cross-border crime, further increasing the risk of smuggling of illicit goods with containerised and bulk cargo at sea, land and air borders.

In the face of these threats, however, Frontex's growing Standing Corps is increasingly well-positioned to tackle both rising cross-border crime and migrant smuggling.

## Return decisions and effective returns continue to diverge

2022 saw no improvement in the gap between return decisions and effective returns of third-country nationals. In

fact, while return decisions further increased (+9% compared with 2021), in the latest statistics, effective returns were almost unchanged (+1.6%), also due to the drop-off in returns to Ukraine. This lacklustre performance carries serious implications for the effectiveness of Schengen and cooperation with third countries and reinforces the imperative for a common EU system for returns. The Policy Document Towards an Operational Strategy for More Effective Returns issued in January 2023 charts the way forward in this regard, recommending the digitalisation of return management and the improvement of data and statistical evidence on return. Meanwhile, Frontex continues to strengthen its return activities (in 2022, 24 850 people were returned with Frontex's support, up from 18 300 in 2021) also through dedicated Action Plans, which include tailored deployment of Standing Corps return profiles to work on the effectiveness of both voluntary and non-voluntary return and reintegration.

## With increasing mobility, old border-check vulnerabilities may resurface

Cross-border mobility has now shaken off the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) forecasts that air passenger demand will rapidly recover to pre-pandemic levels<sup>2</sup> and that 2019 figures will be exceeded by the end of 2023. This may lead to the recurrence of certain capacity shortfalls in European border management.

<sup>1</sup> Europol (2023), Criminal networks in migrant smuggling, Europol Spotlight Report series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icao.int/Newsroom/Pages/ICAO-forecasts-complete-and-sustainable-recovery-and-growth-of-air-passenger-demand-in-2023.aspx>

# Introduction

This document presents the key risks to the EU's external borders and their potential impact on European integrated border management (EIBM). The focus is on the threat dimensions of risks according to the Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM)<sup>1</sup> that will play a likely role in the short term, with an approximate time horizon of one year from the time of writing.

The key risks for EIBM in 2022 were analysed and projections were made in order to provide an outlook in all chapters of the Annual Risk Analysis 2023/2024.

<sup>1</sup> <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/situational-awareness-and-monitoring/ciram/>

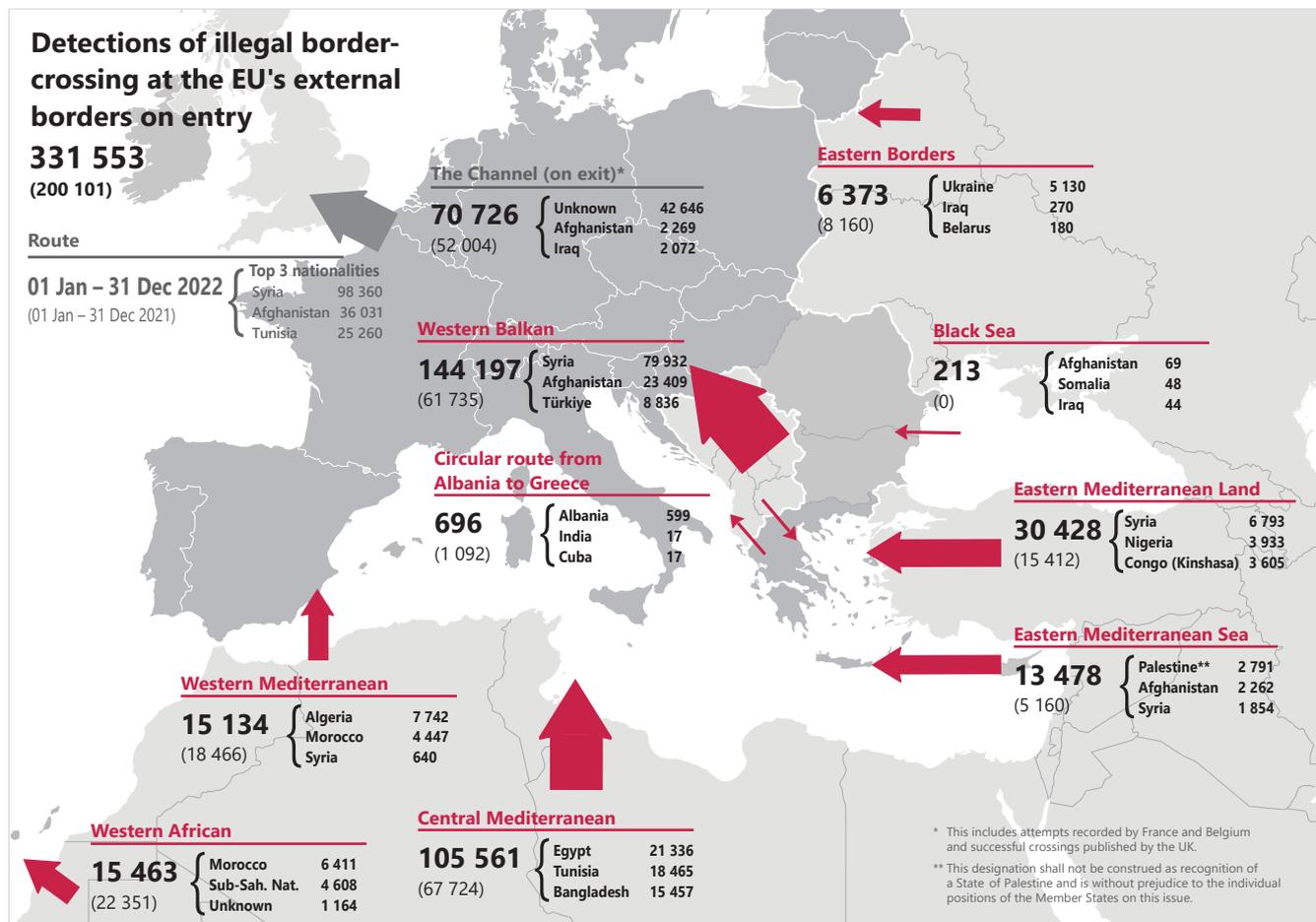
The analysis of different risk categories provides a comprehensive picture of challenges and threats that jeopardise the security and functioning of the EU's external borders. Risks are grouped into three broad categories: irregular migration, secondary movements and returns, and cross-border crime. The report's outlook focuses on the overarching risks the EIBM might face in the near future.

In 2022, a year characterised by both high migration pressure and refugee flows, in total about 332 000 illegal border-crossings on entry were reported by Member States. This was the highest number of detected illegal border-crossings since 2016. The Western Balkan, Central and Eastern Mediterranean

routes were the top 3 migratory routes on entry based on the volume of reported IBCs, while Syrian, Afghan and Tunisian migrants were the most-often reported nationalities.

Whereas in 2022 the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on passenger flows was waning and European border management hence in some sense was returning to pre-pandemic normality, the war in Ukraine drove the fastest population displacement since World War II, with roughly 13 million<sup>2</sup> entering the EU from 24 February until the end of 2022, the majority of whom were women and children.

<sup>2</sup> Circular movements included



Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023





GENDARMERIE

GENDARMERIE

# Irregular Migration



# Irregular migration at the sea borders

Illegal border-crossings at the blue borders increased by 31% in 2022 compared with 2021. With 147 982 detections reported by Member States, the 2022 figure was also considerably higher (+39%) than the pre-pandemic 2019 figure and the highest for this border type since 2017. Whilst well-established corridors such as the Libyan and Tunisian corridors in the Central Mediterranean accounted for the strongest absolute increases, emerging corridors from Lebanon and Syria towards the Central Mediterranean saw incomparably higher relative increases, offering alternative routes to, in particular, Syrian migrants. Altogether, the Central Mediterranean, with 105 561 IBC (71% of all detections on the sea borders), topped the maritime migratory routes, followed by the Western African route (15 463), the sea corridors of the Eastern Mediterranean (13 478) and the Western Mediterranean sea route (13 257).

Overall migratory pressure on the sea borders is, however, inadequately captured by these figures. Pressure from North Africa, for instance, is much higher than these figures suggest, as significant numbers of preventions of exit (this term describes chiefly the interceptions of vessels by third-country authorities before

leaving territorial waters) by these countries were also recorded. UNHCR reported that the Libyan Coast Guard prevented the departure of 24 788 migrants in 2022, which is slightly below the level reported in 2021. In the Eastern Aegean, the Turkish Coast Guard prevented the departure and smuggling of almost 50 000 irregular migrants, more than double the 2021 figure.

The number of vulnerable people was on the rise at the sea border: in 2022, 20 276 minors, 14 073 of them unaccompanied, were recorded in the Central Mediterranean, the highest number on record in recent years. First among the unaccompanied minors were Egyptians (4 356 in 2022), whose figure has seen an increase from 40 recorded in 2019. At the same time there has been an overall increase in Egyptians (21 336 in 2022), propelling the nationality to the most represented one on this route.

A proliferation of new *modi operandi* was also a marked development in 2022. In particular the proliferation of more seaworthy vessels such as fishing boats in the Central Mediterranean suggests that maritime migratory routes may be less dependent on seasonality than in the past. On the corridor from Tunisia, the

growing use of makeshift metal boats has been instrumental in driving up figures since the autumn. In arguably one of the most important developments of 2022, the Libyan corridor saw rising numbers of departures of fishing vessels from the east of the country. Fuelled by charter flights to Benghazi, nationalities such as Bangladeshis, Syrians and to a lesser extent Pakistanis were prominent on this corridor, joined by migrants from neighbouring Egypt as well as other nationalities as the year progressed. In the summer of 2022, people smugglers initiated large numbers of departures of groups of jet skis in the Strait of Gibraltar. Like the increased use of taxi boats, this *modus operandi* enables undetected landings, a noteworthy challenge to border management.

The humanitarian impact of what continues to be a profitable business opportunity for people smugglers in the Mediterranean continues to be devastating: According to IOM, 2 406 migrants were recorded as missing in the Mediterranean in 2022, 17% more than in 2021 (2 062). However, given the increase in departures from North Africa and the Middle East (recorded arrivals

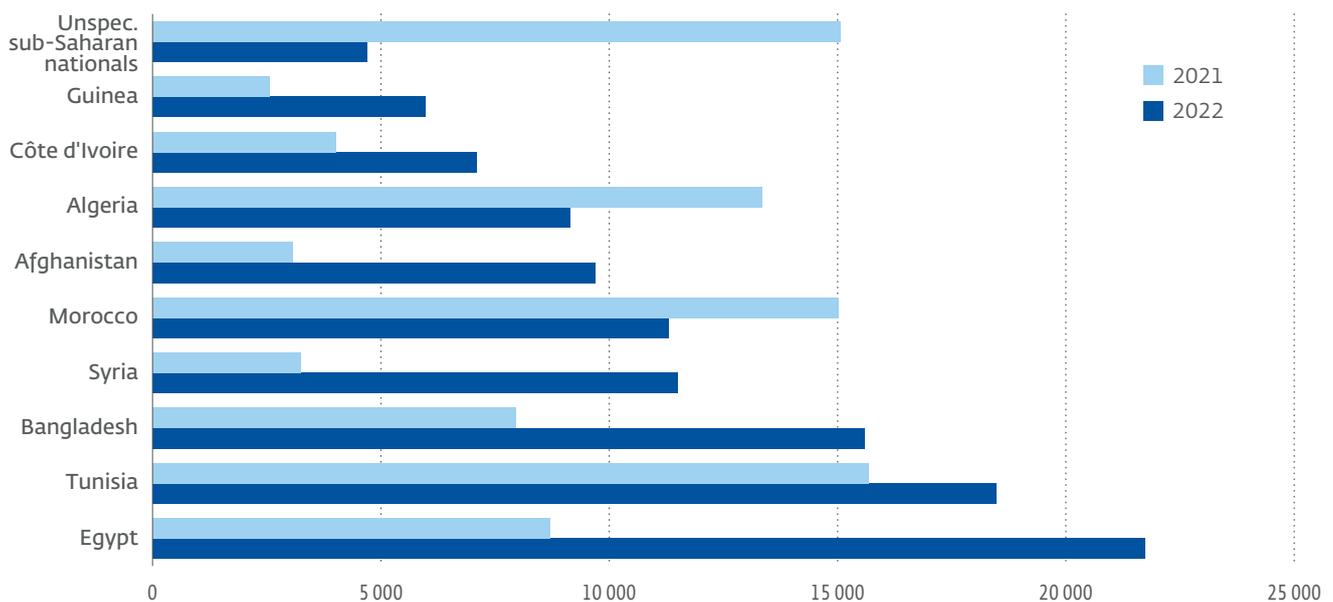


Figure 1. Top 10 Nationalities detected for illegal border-crossing on entry at external sea borders.

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

plus preventions by respective authorities) the 2022 figure may be proportionally smaller.

Looking forward, developments in a range of countries of origin and transit, driven by global macroeconomic drivers (chiefly persistent inflation and global recession) will negatively impact the socio-economic conditions of large populations and foreshadow increasing migratory flows to Europe. These flows, in cases where migratory routes are not pre-defined by geography and narrowly established migratory routes, could have a larger impact on sea borders given the proliferation of technical obstacles on land borders. According to a briefing by the European Parliament Research Service of October 2022, between 2014 and 2022, the aggregate length of border fences on the EU's external borders and within the EU/Schengen area grew from 315 km to 2 048 km, with a substantial hike in 2022.

Another important trend is the use of more seaworthy (but not safer) vessels such as fishing boats. According to Frontex estimates, they have been very profitable for smugglers, so will likely continue to be used as long as they are available for purchase in the Mediterranean basin. Seasonality is therefore likely to have less impact on sea crossings than previously.

For 2023/2024 it is likely that the Eastern Mediterranean and Central Mediterranean route will see more migratory activity and a higher proportion of the overall migratory flows to the external borders. Worsening socioeconomic push factors in major countries of origin and transit as well as host countries of refugees and migrants in the Middle East and South Asia, alongside the dire humanitarian situation and political instability in some of the countries belonging to these regions will likely lead to flows to Europe from the East.

Part of this phenomenon will likely be the increasing use of the corridors from Türkiye, Lebanon and Syria towards the Central Mediterranean, marking a further blurring between the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes. This will

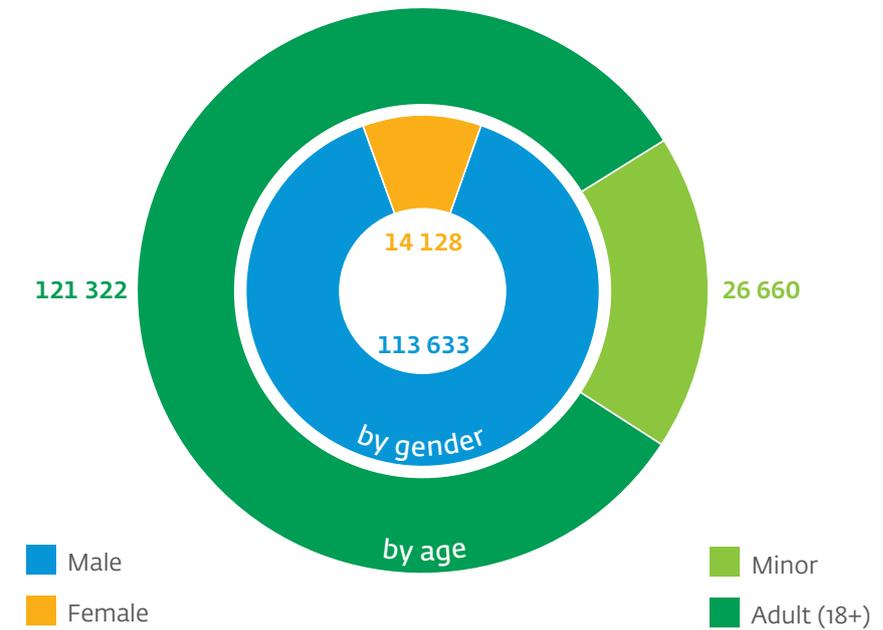


Figure 2. **Demographics of individuals detected for illegal border-crossing on entry at external sea borders. Gender breakdown excludes data not available.**

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

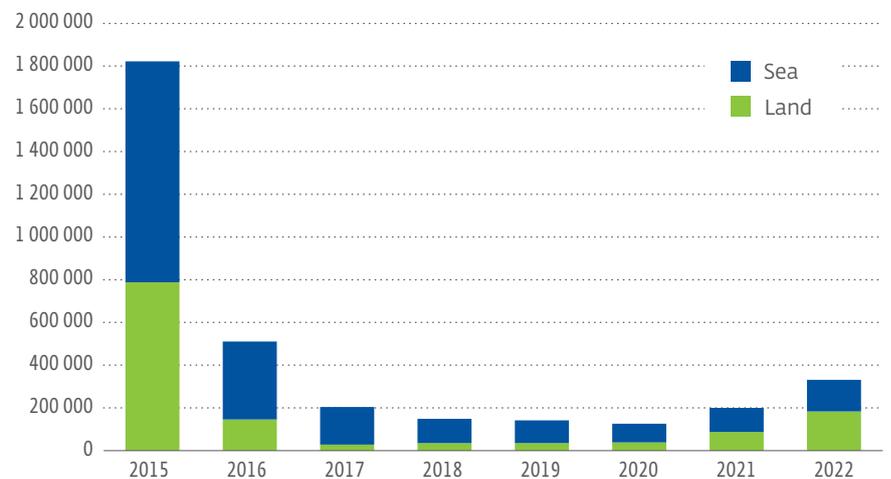


Figure 3. **Illegal border-crossings on entry by border type 2015 to 2022.**

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

be exacerbated by increasing air connections between the two geographical areas, which have already resulted in migrants such as Syrians – traditionally seen only in the Eastern Mediterranean – being registered on routes from Libya. Joining the northward flows from Libya and Tunisia will be rising numbers of North African migrants and from various sub-Saharan countries, whose

countries face sobering economic, security, human rights and climate forecasts for 2023/2024.

Factors mitigating the flows of irregular migrants are increased cooperation across the Mediterranean and renewed bilateral and multilateral efforts to enable third-country authorities to prevent migrant smuggling on their territory.

# Irregular migration at the land borders

With an increase of 110% in detections vis-à-vis 2021, the detections on entry reported by Member States at land borders in 2022 (183 571) would indicate a much higher proportionate increase in migration pressure as compared to the sea borders (+31%). However, repeat IBCs significantly bumped up the numbers on the Western Balkans land routes. As a result, comparing the number of IBCs to previous periods may be misleading as to the number of migrants concerned. However, even if one excludes this route from the comparison, migratory pressure at land borders is still the highest it has been since 2016, though the increase compared to 2021 is less accentuated. An outsized share of 135 292 illegal border-crossings were reported on the borders to Serbia (74% of all crossings at land borders). Of note, three nationalities (Syrian, followed at a distance by Afghans and nationals of Türkiye) accounted for 68% of reported illegal border-crossings at land borders.

In a major development at the land borders in 2022, on the Western Balkan route, nationalities hitherto rarely seen on this route were reported, such as Tunisians, Indians and Burundians. These nationalities did not require a visa in

some Western Balkan countries. This visa freedom was increasingly exploited in 2022. The reintroduction of visas for Burundians and Tunisians in some Western Balkan countries came fairly late in the year (other key countries of origin followed later) but had a measurable effect towards the very end of 2022. Numerous secondary movements of migrants in Central Europe were among the knock-on effects of outflows from the Western Balkans in 2022.

On the Eastern land borders, a quarter fewer IBCs were recorded (6 373 against 8 160 in 2021). The focus of the reported cases shifted significantly compared to 2021, with fewer counted on the borders with Belarus and more on those with Ukraine. The Belarusian instrumentalization of migration continued in 2022, however with less intensity. Meanwhile, at the borders to Ukraine 5 224 illegal border-crossings were registered, peaking in March 2022. The concerned individuals were almost all Ukrainian men of military age.

Going forward, detections of illegal border-crossings at the land borders in 2023/2024 could fall somewhat in comparison to the previous period as on the one hand land borders at the European

external borders are increasingly covered by robust technical obstacles alongside increased surveillance and deployments of border guards (including Frontex deployments within Joint Operation Terra). On the other hand, there are signs that the Western Balkans, which account for the above-mentioned outsized share thereof, may see a moderate decrease in pressure as visa policy alignment in the region works to decrease numbers of select nationalities and on account of fewer secondary movements transiting the region after having arrived first on the Eastern Mediterranean route.

Developments at the land borders to the Western Balkans could once again hold surprises for European border management as visa policies change and loopholes are exploited. Steps in the direction of visa policy alignment have shown promising results. At the same time, it has also been a question of border guard capacity at the major airports to issue refusals of entry to those who clearly have not arrived with forthright reasons for their stay. That aside, there is a chance that migrants reroute to other countries in the Western Balkans, where some of the concerned nationalities still remain visa free. In particular, the uptick of

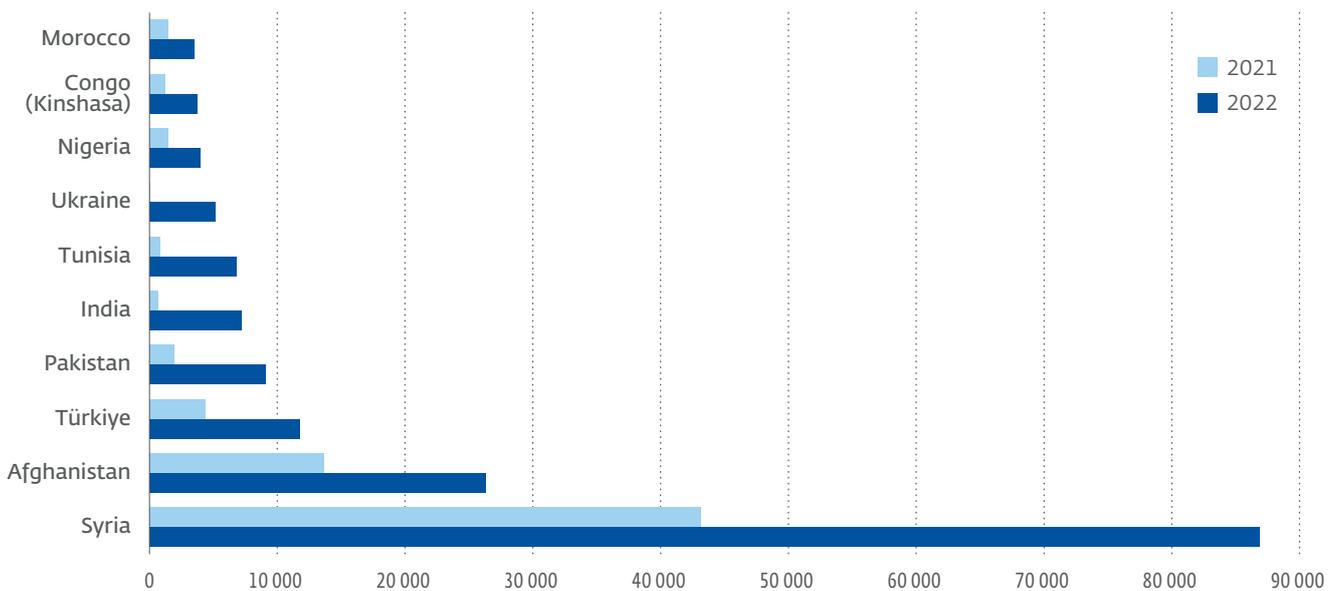


Figure 4. Top 10 Nationalities detected for illegal border-crossing on entry at external land borders.

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

Russian nationals detected at borders in the region towards the very end of 2022 could be indicative of further flows, especially if further waves of mobilisation lead to additional outflows of Russians.

Further factors that may come to have an impact in this complex region (falling into the low likelihood, high impact category) are increasing signs of instability amidst the resurfacing of dormant ethnic tensions.

The war in Ukraine and increasing tensions with Russia and Belarus hold a host of scenarios that could at short notice have an immense effect on the EU land borders, be they due to refugee outflows (orderly via border-crossing points or via the green border) or men fleeing further mobilisation. The stability in many of the countries across the Eastern Land Borders has been drawn into question since the invasion of Ukraine, including in the aggressor country itself. Furthermore, the likelihood of the use of irregular migration as a pressure tool may increase given the increasingly tense geopolitical tensions to in particular the European Union's east. While Ukraine has proven itself to be impressively resilient in the face of persistent attacks on the civilian infrastructure, hazards such as nuclear contamination

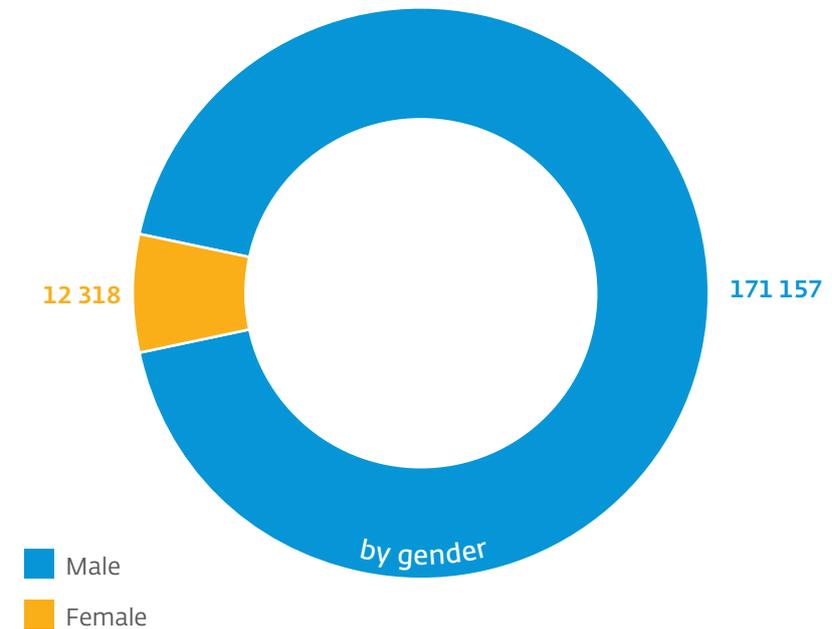


Figure 5. **Demographics of individuals detected for illegal border-crossing on entry at external land borders.**

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

caused by intentional or accidental targeting of nuclear power plants for instance may see different results.

Solid contingency planning of the Member States and the EBCG as a whole is hence crucial for mitigating the potential impact at the land borders.

Additionally, robust preparedness may also serve as a pre-empting factor that the planners of instrumentalisation of migration or other activities of hybrid nature need to take into account.

# Clandestine entry

In 2022, a total of 1 680 clandestine entry attempts were reported by Member States – a substantial fall of 36% compared with 2021. This decrease occurred both at land and sea border-crossing points (BCPs), with a steeper relative decrease at sea borders. As one would expect, this *modus operandi* is particularly used at BCPs handling large vehicle, cargo or train traffic, which tends to increase the chances that clandestine entries will go unnoticed. The fall in reported cases in 2022 was largely due to fewer reported cases at BCPs with the Western Balkan countries. Somewhat more cases were reported from the land borders with Türkiye, Moldova and Ukraine.

Data for clandestine entry depend on the detection rate and the intensity of border surveillance measures/border checks and controls. Especially when considered in contrast to the increased detections at the green borders, the fall in cases seems counterintuitive. Perhaps with the increase in cross-border traffic after the COVID-19 pandemic a larger share of clandestine entries simply went undetected in 2022, or increasingly sophisticated methods to hide migrants resulted in successful border-crossings. These are possibilities that cannot be ruled out and that would cause the number of cases detected to not reflect the true extent of the phenomenon.

Almost six out of ten cases of reported clandestine entry at the external land borders were reported from only four border-crossing points, all of them to the Western Balkans. This geographical focus may be considered to some extent an indicator of the continued resolve of the migrants in the region and the level of border security, also expressed by the repeat attempts counted among illegal border-crossings on the region's green borders.

Clandestine entry continues to be a high-risk *modus operandi* associated with a particular migrant profile. It tends to be used by males (94% in 2022), who are predominantly young (at least 59% below the age of 34 in 2022). For the last few years, Afghan migrants have been by a large margin the most numerous among those detected for clandestine entry at the external borders and in 2022, 33% of all cases were Afghan migrants. Together with the second-most reported nationality (Syrians with 15%), and the third most reported nationality (Turks with 10%), they accounted for more than 58%.

If interceptions reported via the Frontex Risk Analysis Network are an adequate representation of the most common *modi operandi* at the external borders (an admittedly strong assumption), then hiding in and under lorries is the most typical means of clandestine

entry at land borders (at least 66% of all cases reported), while hiding on ferries is the most reported *modus operandi* at sea borders.

Successful clandestine entry enables unknown numbers of potentially high-risk individuals to enter the EU undetected. It also enables unimpeded secondary movements through the area of free movement (and hence enables the movements of high-risk individuals such as terrorists or foreign agents/saboteurs). The increasing sophistication of attempts to hide migrants in vehicles creates an operational imperative to employ expensive and time-consuming ways to mitigate the threat, impeding external borders by slowing down bona fide traffic as well as diverting resources from other tasks.

There is much to suggest that clandestine entry may increase in the next year in line with expected higher migratory pressure at the EU external borders in general. Heightened security measures make the green border harder to cross. At the same time, increased vehicle traffic at select border-crossing points (not to mention possibly altered circumstances while crossing land BCPs during the introduction of the Entry-Exit System) increases the chances of clandestine migrants going undetected, often under life-threatening and inhumane conditions.

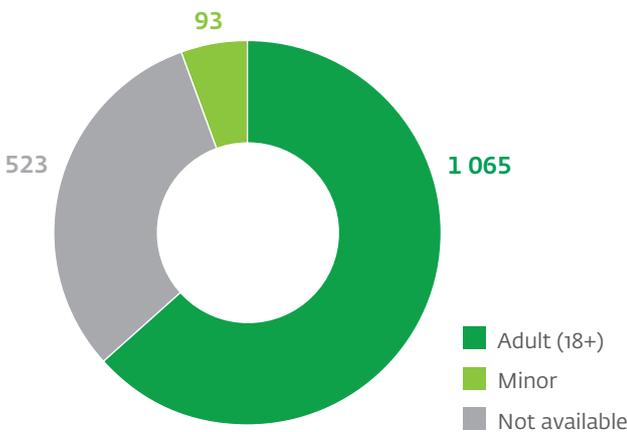


Figure 6. Demographics of individuals detected for clandestine entry at land and sea BCPs in 2022: AGE

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

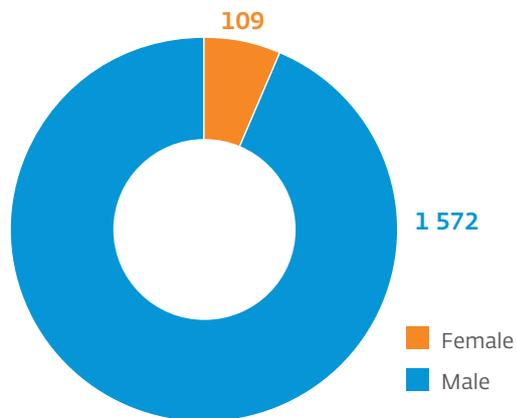


Figure 7. Demographics of individuals detected for clandestine entry at land and sea BCPs in 2022: GENDER

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023



Further, the nationalities most often found using this *modus operandi* in recent years (Afghans and Syrians foremost) come from countries where some of the largest increases in movements to Europe may be expected. Hence, assuming some degree of proportionality, increased irregular movements to Europe will also result in increased clandestine entry. In light of changing migration and border management in the EU, in particular the aforementioned proliferation of border fences, it is possible that this *modus operandi* will grow more attractive relative to well-established irregular migration routes.

As a significant share of the detections of clandestine entry cases result from customs controls rather than border checks (customs inspections by nature

are more likely to lead to the discovery of hidden passengers), increased cooperation with customs authorities continues to be an operational imperative, as is the need for closing gaps in the equipment necessary to detect clandestine entries. Neighbouring countries' exit checks have and will play a crucial role in this *modus operandi*. Diligent exit checks prevent an unknown number of clandestine entries, hence cooperation with these countries is crucial. Importantly, exit checks reflect both operational capabilities and political will (the latter often of course determining the former). In view of the factors described in the previous chapter, there are a range of neighbouring countries that may decide to relax their exit checks at the border, which may trigger the need for a swift operational

response. In cases where neighboring countries are cooperative, 'forward deployment' of the EBCG Standing Corps may help in collaboratively establishing and rolling out best practices in exit checks leading up to EU borders.

On exit from the EU, attempts to reach the UK by clandestine entry were largely superseded by the small boats *modus operandi* in 2022. The resulting new legislation that the UK is introducing in 2023/2024 could lead to renewed attempts to hide on ferries or in trucks, as entering undetected would once again be much more attractive than running the risk of being denied the right to apply for asylum and being deported. The mere prospect of the new legislation could also have this result.

# Document fraud

Document fraud continues to be a key enabler of threats at the EU's external borders. In 2022, the number of fraudulent documents reported within the European Union Document Fraud Risk Analysis Network (EDF-RAN) increased by 5% in relation to 2021. EU Member States/Schengen Associated Countries in 2022 detected a total of 19 341 users of fraudulent documents (or in possession thereof) and 26 249 fraudulent documents at the EU's external borders and in intra-EU/Schengen secondary movements.

The increased number of detections in 2022, and the type and nationality of the fraudulent documents mostly detected, were mainly influenced by the rise in passenger flow at the EU/Schengen borders following the phasing out of most COVID-19 restrictions on travel, and by the growing migratory pressure on the EU's external borders over the past year. Events such as the war in Ukraine, the closure of the EU's airspace to Russian and Belarusian flights and other constraints on movements across some borders also affected the numbers.

Passports became the most reported fraudulent document type within EDF-RAN in 2022, with an increase of 35% relative to 2021. Despite the 6% decrease in detections of fraudulent ID cards, mainly connected with the drop in detections on exit to the UK, these documents were the second most used by fraudsters. The detection of counterfeit health/vaccination certificates and the use of fraudulent supporting work-related documents at the EU's eastern borders fell steeply, as was expected with the reduction in significance of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the year, and due to the war in Ukraine. Other documents, such as counterfeit driving licences and counterfeit vehicle registration documents, continued to be reported in high numbers. The number of fraudulent border stamps increased 23%, with the overwhelming majority being counterfeit. This *modus operandi* was mainly encountered on the EU's borders with the Western Balkans region. The use of fraudulent residence permits slightly increased compared to

2021. The most notable increase in the use of fraudulent stamps and residence permits in 2022, in terms of nationality of the fraudsters, was among Russian nationals on movements across the EU's land borders. While fraudulent visas were the least reported type of document in 2022, detections still more than doubled, which was the highest increase of any document type. This steep rise was mostly due to detections of counterfeit and fraudulently obtained short-term (C-type) visas.

Counterfeit documents and impersonation were the most commonly reported types of fraud, accounting for 64% and 15% of detections of document related fraud in 2022 respectively.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was the main factor that caused Ukrainians to drop to second place in terms of nationalities detected using fraudulent documents at the EU borders. In 2022 the most detected nationality was Albanian. Iran ranked third, but if cases where final destination or place of embarkation were reported as *unknown* are included in this analysis, Iranians become the most prevalent in terms of detections at the external borders.

The overall number of detections on entry from third countries decreased last year. With the number of detections at the air borders increasing steadily since 2019, this decrease was mainly due to changes to movements on the eastern land borders as a consequence of the war in Ukraine.

International airports in Western Asia continue to be the main last departure points of fraudulent documents detected on entry at the EU's external air borders. Last year, the most noticeable change in this situational picture was a growing trend in detections of fraudsters, mainly of Indian and Pakistani nationality, arriving from airports in the Arabian Peninsula. These airports became major hubs for threats connected with irregular migration based on the use of fraudulent documents. Most routes from these airports are likely to maintain

their current levels of fraud or see an increase in 2023.

Detections on exit movements to third countries increased nearly 30% on 2021. The vast majority of these detections were at the air borders and represent a growing trend of exploitation of the EU's air BCPs as platforms for irregular migratory movements involving the use of fraudulent documents. The UK was the main final destination for such movements. Syrian, Turkish and Albanian were the nationalities mainly reported, and impersonation was used in almost a quarter of incidents.

In 2022, users of fraudulent documents detected at the EU's external land borders decreased 50% on 2021. Most fraudulent documents were driving licences, vehicle registration documents and supportive work-related documents. It is likely that this trend and *modus operandi* will continue at least until the end of the war. As the conflict in Ukraine goes on, the risk of human trafficking, in particular of children, rises at all Ukrainian land border sections and routes to the EU. Counterfeit and fraudulently obtained Ukrainian identity and support documents may be exploited in this respect, so it is crucial that operational capacity and capability during border controls are adequate in terms of document fraud detection and identification of vulnerable individuals.

The overall number of detections in the maritime domain increased slightly in 2022. This growth, relative to 2021, relates mainly to incidents involving Albanians and Georgians on exit to the UK. Enhanced border-control activities and mitigation measures in the Channel may cause a rise in attempted border-crossings involving fraudulent documents. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, BCPs on this border accounted for the highest number of fraudulent document detections on the external maritime borders. A return to methods traditionally exploited by fraudsters in these areas, such as imposter use of documents, is therefore expected.

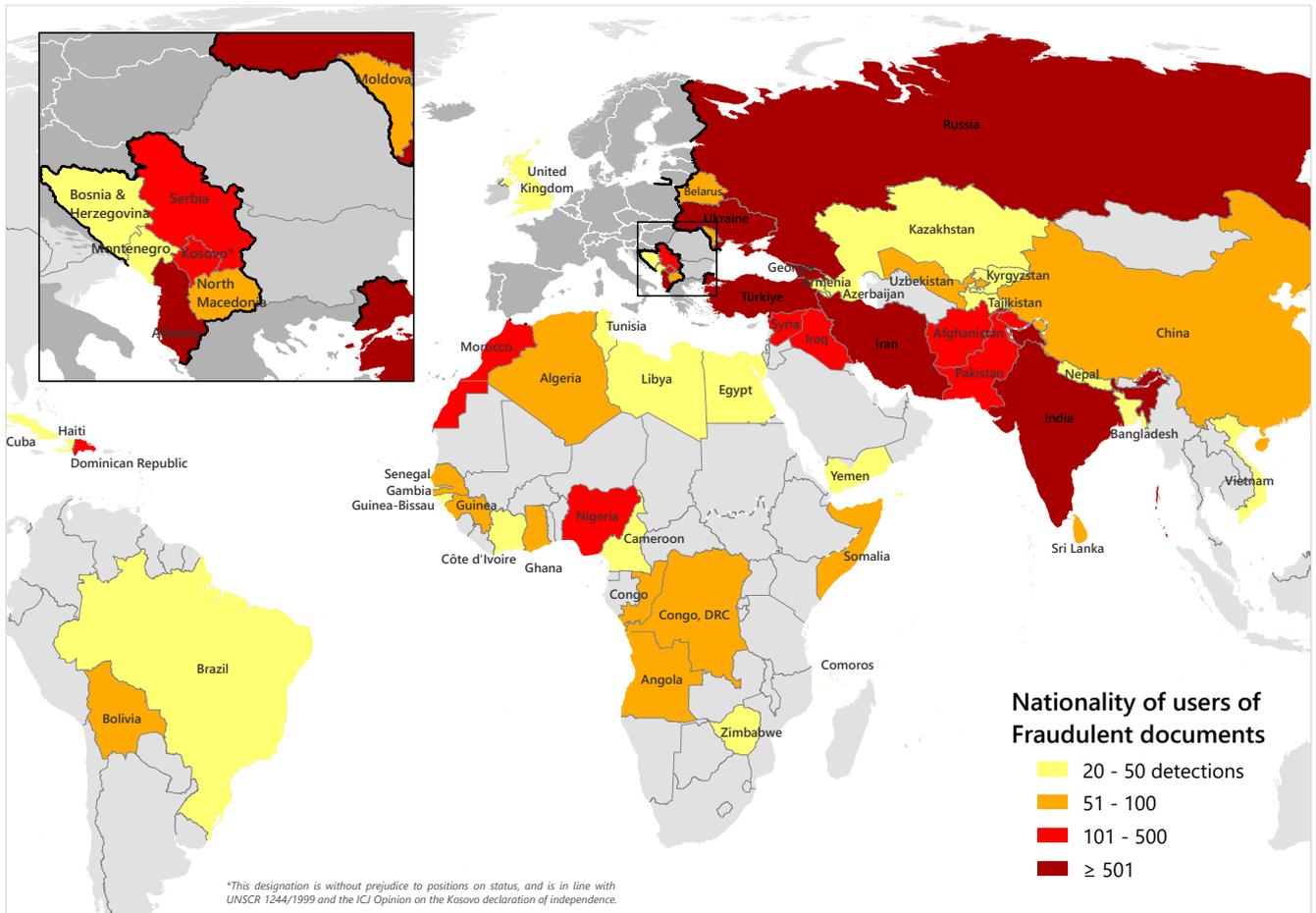


Figure 8. **Detections of fraudulent document users from third countries at the EU's external borders in 2022, by nationality of the holder of the fraudulent document**

In 2022, the number of incidents related to document fraud on secondary movements within the EU/Schengen area was relatively stable compared to 2021. Most cases continue to be detected on air routes from southern Europe to central and northern MS/SAC. Ireland was the main destination for users of fraudulent documents. Nationalities most detected in intra-EU/Schengen movements were Syrian, Turkish and Albanian. Impersonation was used in almost a quarter of incidents. The increasing migratory pressure in the Central and Eastern Med will have an eventual effect on secondary movements from MS of entry and will likely contribute to a higher number of fraudsters detected on these routes.

Overall push factors remain high, and as forgers increase their mastery of printing and identity fraud technologies, so does the level of complexity for detections during border checks. Independent

of occasional shifts in risk profiles, routes or types of documents exploited, document fraud has had, and will continue to have, a central role in various *modi operandi* used by irregular migrants – whether smuggled by organised criminal groups or travelling by themselves – in crossing the external border and in secondary movements within the EU.

The EU has made a significant investment in tackling document and identity fraud in recent years. But this is an ongoing competition and the EIBM system will continue to face serious challenges in this domain. Recruitment, training or redeployment of specialists in document and identity fraud and fundamental rights, and investment in border control facilities and state-of-the-art equipment at BCPs is paramount. Effective cooperation with counterparts in third countries to tackle transnational OCGs and the provision of sufficient first- and second-line officers during peak seasons

and undue or disproportionate flows of passengers are crucial. The combination of these mitigation measures will increase detection capacity and capability at the external borders.

Strengthening the resilience of the EIBM system to document fraud will significantly reduce its impact on the functioning and security of the external borders, as well as the impact of crimes that it enables. Reducing the likelihood of individuals with fraudulent documents entering the EU or undertaking secondary movements will downgrade the level of a wide range of threats to internal security and support the full functionality of the area of free movement, including ensuring the smooth flow of *bona fide* passengers. Enhancing the detection of fraudulent documents at the external borders will also raise the likelihood of identifying, and subsequently protecting, smuggled or trafficked individuals and vulnerable groups.



B 6 2



## Secondary Movements/Returns

## Secondary movements

In 2022, EU MS/SAC reported the highest level of secondary movements since 2016<sup>1</sup>. Authorities registered 317 500 detections of third-country nationals travelling within the EU/Schengen Area without permission to stay, 92% more than in 2021.<sup>2</sup> This increase was mostly due to more irregular migrants detected en route from the Western Balkans region towards more Western and Northern EU MS/SAC. The situation at the EU external borders with the Western Balkan countries is mainly fueled by the transit migration via the Eastern Mediterranean and the arrivals in Western Balkan countries based on their visa policies.

Many migrants detected on these routes were of nationalities that are required to hold a visa to enter the Schengen area but enjoyed visa-free travel to one or more third countries. For example, illegally staying Indian and Tunisian nationals ranked third and fourth, respectively, as regards intra-EU/Schengen movements in 2022 and were particularly prevalent on the Western Balkan route. Following intensive consultations of the EU with Western Balkan states in 2022, a visible decrease was observed in the secondary movements of third-country nationals who had previously arrived at

certain third-country airports and then illegally crossed the EU's external borders. Their number is expected to further decline in 2023. Moreover, since 2021, three third countries in the Western Balkans currently host a fully-fledged Frontex operation, thereby supporting their authorities in the prevention of future irregular migration to the EU.

The intra-Schengen routes emanating from the Western Balkans were also used by third-country nationals who had entered the EU on the Eastern Mediterranean route. As the number of arrivals in the Eastern Mediterranean remains large, it can be expected that irregular secondary movements towards EU MS/SAC in the west and north of the EU will remain on a high level in 2023. The flow mostly consists of Afghan and Syrian nationals but also nationals from North Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The increase in irregular migration on the Central Mediterranean route in 2022 bears a significant risk of increased secondary flows in 2023. Current northward secondary movements show a clear upward trend. This trend is likely to consolidate in 2023, especially considering increasing illegal border-crossings in summertime. Almost half of the third-country nationals irregularly travelling in the Central Mediterranean are migrants from Middle Eastern or Asian countries, such as Syria and Pakistan.

When apprehended in a transit country within the EU/Schengen Area, migrants often try to continue their trip by applying for asylum and then absconding. This phenomenon finds reflection in the high rate of implicitly withdrawn applications and the large

number of take back requests made under the Dublin Regulation. EUAA analysis<sup>3</sup> indicates that many more asylum applications were implicitly withdrawn in the EU/SAC in 2022 than in any of the past five years.

The ratio of withdrawn applications to applications lodged thus rose from about 1 in 10 in the previous 4 years to 1 in 7 in 2022.<sup>4</sup>

The reasons for secondary movements are multifaceted and difficult to generalise. Although asylum recognition rates for some nationalities differ strongly across EU MS/SAC, it is not clear to what extent this might encourage secondary movements. For example, Syrians have rather high recognition rates all over Europe – including in typical transit countries – and have still been moving onwards. Furthermore, secondary movements also take place after protection status has been granted in another EU MS/SAC. In such cases, the actual content of protection status and related integration and livelihood opportunities, which differ between EU MS/SAC, may be a determining factor.

Another important aspect might be differences in reception conditions and accommodation facilities across EU MS/SAC, which are also found to play a role for beneficiaries. The mere availability of reception space in general or for particular groups (e.g. vulnerable persons) can be crucial.

- 1 Secondary movements are defined as the journeys undertaken by third-country nationals from one EU/SAC to another without the prior consent of national authorities and with or without facilitation. This includes travelling without an entry visa, with absent or insufficient documentation normally required for travel purposes, with fraudulent documentation, and overstayers.
- 2 According to FRAN indicator on detections of illegal stay on the move.

- 3 Chapter prepared in cooperation with the EUAA.
- 4 <https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-report-2023/448-withdrawn-applications>

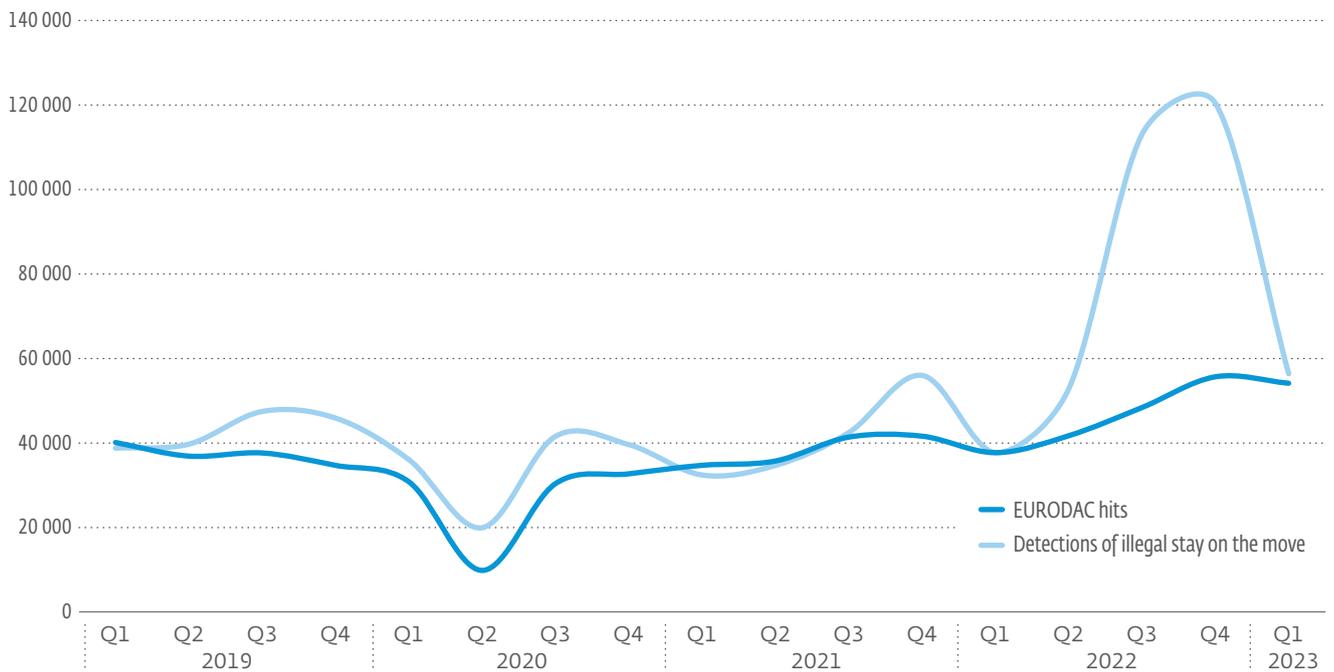


Figure 9. Secondary movements have been increasing since 2020. The discrepancies between illegal stay on the move and Eurodac hits point to gaps in the registration of the irregular migrants at the EU external borders.

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

For example, insufficient reception space has led to temporary accommodation in containers and tents in some countries.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has put additional pressure on reception capacities across the EU.

Moreover, having family members already staying in specific EU countries might also be a significant driver of secondary movements.

<sup>5</sup> <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/use-temporary-reception-structures-during-winter-season>

Insufficient registration after detection at the EU's external borders complicates subsequent identification of arrivals in other EU MS/SAC and hinders their transfer back to those countries that should be in charge of examining the application for international protection under the Dublin procedure. This significantly facilitates secondary movements. In 2022, according to eu-LISA data, the number of Eurodac registrations (category 2) was 42% lower than the number of the illegal crossings detected at the EU's external border.

The migration pressure currently affecting the EU's external borders remains

high, especially in terms of arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route. Therefore, it is very likely that the level of secondary movements will remain high or even increase in 2023. Again, this underlines the importance of mitigating vulnerabilities in the registration and accommodation of migrants crossing the EU's external borders illegally. Moreover, addressing gaps in the return systems of individual EU MS/SAC and swifter implementation of Dublin transfers may also discourage irregular migrants from undertaking secondary movements across Europe.

# Risks to returns

With around 86 000 effective returns of third-country nationals, the 2022 figure was almost unchanged compared to 2021 (+1.6%). Hence the last three years were the years with the lowest figures of effective returns since the data collection began in 2011.

There are multiple reasons for the low number of effective returns in 2022, the most important one being the war in Ukraine. In the years 2018–2022, Ukrainians were the third-country nationality accounting for the highest number of returns. The Temporary Protection Directive adopted after Russia's invasion allows Ukrainian refugees to stay in the EU MS/SAC. Moreover, a lack of cooperation also substantially reduced the returns to Russia in 2022.

As the pandemic-related travel restrictions were being relaxed in 2022, it would be reasonable to expect an overall increase in effective returns. Instead, their number barely rose. On the other hand, Member States reported a more marked increase in return decisions issued in 2022 (515 000, 9% more than in 2021). At the same time, the number of illegal border-crossings surged much more significantly, i.e. by 66% between these two years.

## What are the challenges on the way to more returns?

The European Commission's policy document towards an operational strategy for more effective returns issued in January 2023 points to the current challenges and obstacles on the way to an effective return system. Specifically, the document mentions problems such as lengthy administrative and judicial procedures, difficulties in preventing absconding, insufficient resources, and limited administrative capacity to follow up on return decisions.

In fact, available indicators related to the irregular migration management show large discrepancies between irregular migration, negative asylum decisions, and return decisions on one

hand and the effective returns on the other. The number of effective returns is many times lower than those reported for irregular migration and asylum indicators. This shows a considerable mismatch between return and migration/asylum processes in the reporting countries. Moreover, the chronological evolution of the average number of return decisions issued per one return suggests the return procedures are getting increasingly lengthy.<sup>1</sup>

There is a growing divergence between the Western Balkan countries, which have a positive track record on return cooperation, and other regions, such as Western African states, to which returns tend to be difficult. Hence while the ratio between the reported decisions per effective return actually carried out has stayed fairly similar for Western Balkan nationals, the ratio has steeply risen for Western African, Southern Asian and Northern African nationals. This suggests that the relation between decisions and effective returns can be used as an approximate indicator for the effectiveness of returns.

The Commission's policy document also points out the challenges posed by insufficient level of cooperation with countries of origin. MS data show that third-country authorities issued 18 413 Emergency Travel Documents (ETDs) in 2022, which is a 5% decrease in relation to the previous year. The number of Member States' requests for identification, verification, or ETDs to consular authorities on the other hand increased to 61 464 (+11%).

1 It should be noted that comparisons between the numbers of returns decisions and effective returns should be undertaken with caution, for various reasons, such as multiple return decisions being issued to the same individual or single return decision being issued to multiple persons.

## What is the expected impact of the challenges to the return caseload and what nationalities are most likely to add to it in 2023?

An overall forecast of the return situation in 2023 would be complex and rather unreliable with the currently available return data. An enhanced data collection and more reporting completeness, timeliness and accuracy would be required to better understand the situation.

The following outlook discusses some selected regions and third-countries of origin which are deemed most likely to increase the return caseload in 2023.

### Returns to West African countries

The current numbers of asylum applications by West African nationals and detected West African illegal stayers do not suggest the future return caseload will necessarily increase. However, the irregular migration pressure from West African countries on the Central Mediterranean route rose significantly in the fourth quarter of 2022. Until September 2022, about 800 irregular migrants from that region were registered in the Central Mediterranean per month but then this indicator surged to 3 700 in December.

The recent increase in West African migrants arriving in the Central Mediterranean has not yet had any major effect on the number of secondary movements and return decisions. However, a further increase on this route is likely, and the average asylum recognition rate<sup>2</sup> is at around merely 30%. In addition, the level of cooperation with West African countries' authorities is rather low, resulting in only few returns being carried out compared with the number of return decisions issued.

2 Based on first instance decisions and includes national forms of protection. National forms of protection are treated as positive decisions for the purposes of the analysis on return.

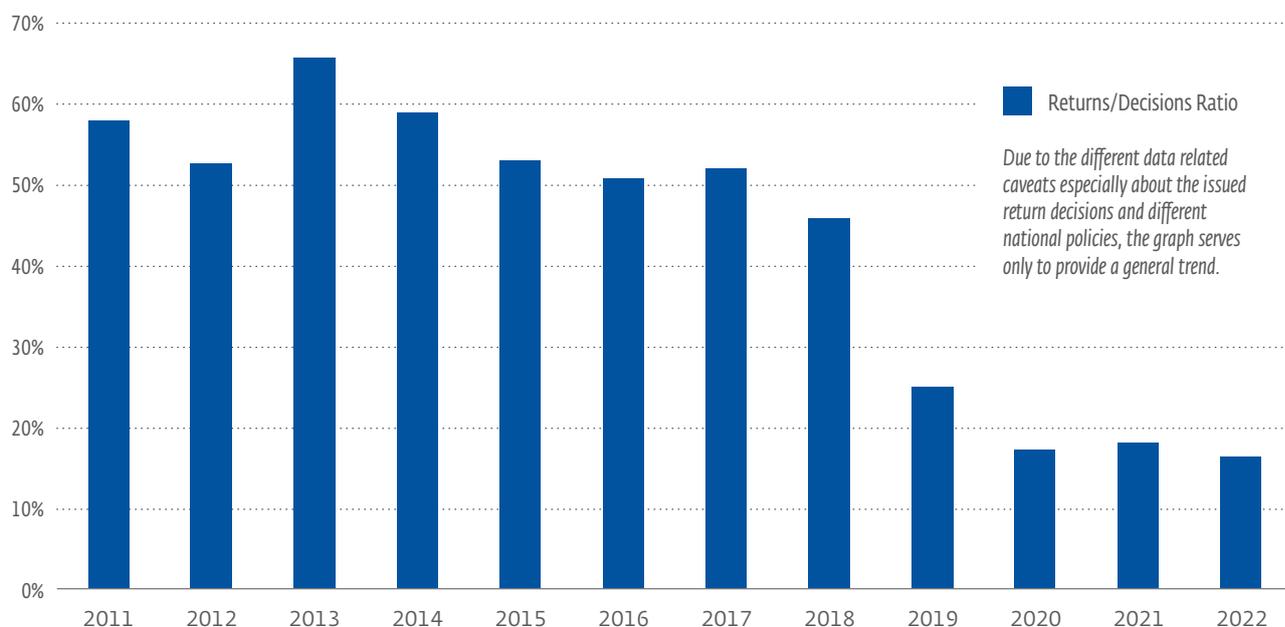
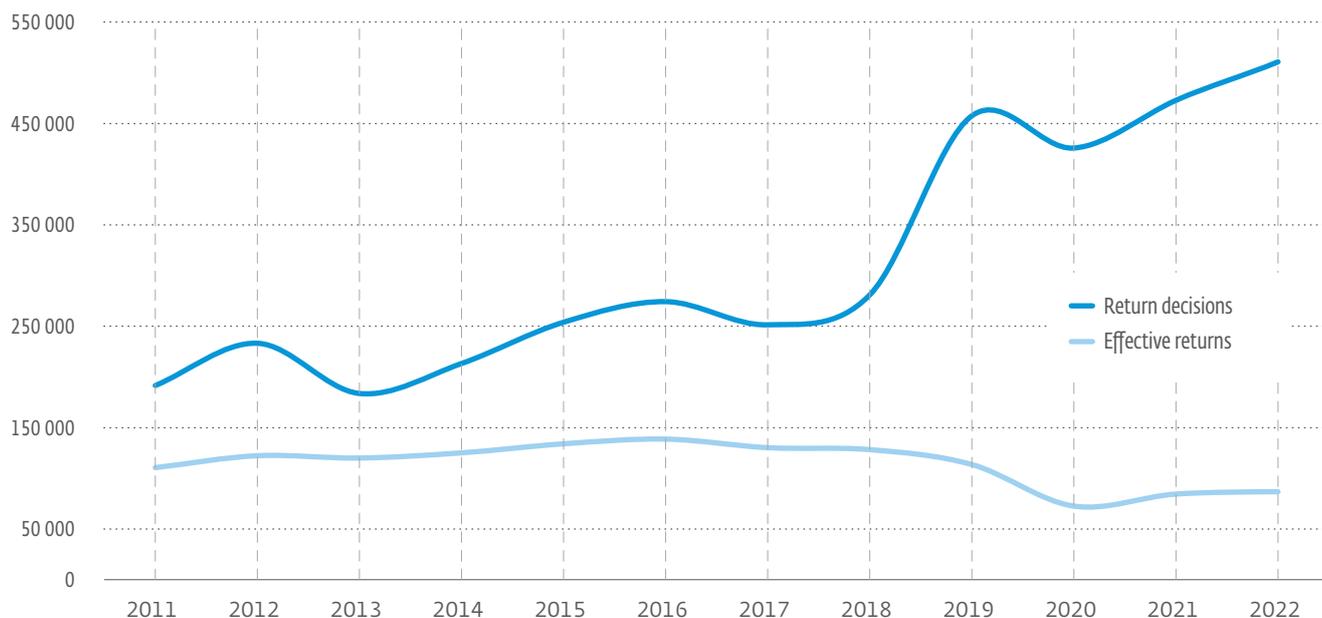


Figure 10. **Without UK, 2011-2018: No return decisions from France. Since 2013, the gap between effective returns and return decisions has slowly been growing. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend in 2020, as the number of conducted returns amounted to only 17% of the return decisions issued.**

Source: RDC data as of 10 August 2023

### Returns to North African countries

The irregular migration pressure towards the EU as regards North African nationals, increased considerably in 2022. In the second half of 2022, the number of detections of illegal stayers increased by around 70%. Most of the increase was due to migrant boat arrivals in Italy. Most of the irregular migrants coming from North Africa applied for asylum. Asylum

authorities of EU MS/SAC issued around 25 000 negative asylum decisions to nationals of this region in 2022, with the recognition rate of only around 20%. EU MS/SAC reported about 112 000 return decisions, but only around 8 500 North African country nationals were effectively returned.

The migration pressure on the Western Balkans route eased off as Serbia tightened its entry rules and other

Western Balkan countries aligned visa policies with the EU. However, the currently observed increase on the Central Mediterranean route, a large 2022 backlog of pending return decisions, and a rather insufficient and unsustainable level of cooperation with third-country authorities point to an increased caseload of returns to North Africa in 2023.





## Cross-Border Crime

# Smuggling of illicit drugs

Large-scale drug trafficking on the EU's external borders remained a serious security threat in 2022. Like in the previous year, EU seaports continued to register record-breaking yearly results in the fight against drug trafficking with increasing incidence of large-volume seizures.

In 2022, reported seizures amounted to 1 898 cases and 252 tonnes of illicit drugs. These results include 1 243 drug-related incidents and almost 97 tonnes of drugs seized in the framework of Frontex-coordinated joint operations<sup>1</sup>, as well as the detection of a further 655 cases and 155 tonnes during border control and surveillance activities.<sup>2</sup> Operational results show a significant increase in drug smuggling incidents in 2022 compared with 2021. This increase confirms the persistent trend in the growth in drug supply, significantly exceeding the demand in the European drug market.

Most of the cases concerned the smuggling of hashish (146 tonnes, down 50% year-on-year), but cocaine seizures almost doubled for the second year in a row (89 tonnes, up 90% year-on-year). The large volumes were mostly due to maritime seizures on the shores and at the seaports of the countries on the North Sea and the Western Mediterranean. In addition, open-source information contributed to the cross-border crime situational picture in 2022 by underlining the impact of cocaine trafficking on the main seaports in the North Sea. Detections at EU airports also contributed to the increase in the reports by adding over 5 tonnes of various drugs smuggled in passengers' luggage, postal packages, and air cargo. As usual, herbal cannabis (9 tonnes) was mostly seized along land routes and during inland detections in EU Member States and third countries in the south of Europe and the Western Balkans.

Cocaine trafficking in containers from Latin America towards Europe's main

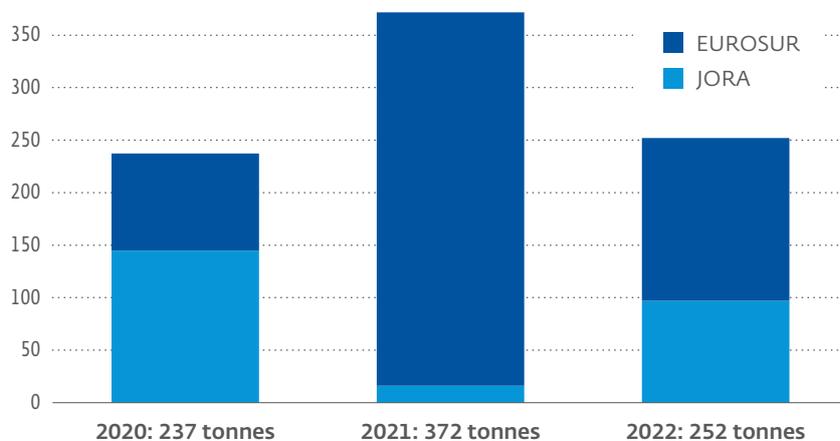


Figure 11. Drug seizures reported to Frontex (tonnes)

seaports in the North Sea and North Atlantic remained most notable, with consecutive record-high quantities registered over the last few years. Rotterdam Port reported 41 tonnes of cocaine last year,<sup>3</sup> while open sources suggested a significant surge of trafficking to the other most popular transport hub in the North Sea – Antwerp.<sup>4</sup> Most of the seizures were reported in both refrigerated and dry containers and included the so called “rip-off” *modus operandi*. Many of the cases were related to an unauthorised access to containers. Northern Europe was also targeted by criminal networks through French and German ports in the North Sea. Incidental seizures in the Baltic Sea demonstrate the increasing risk for small ports in northern Europe indicating possible rerouting of drug trafficking, taking advantage of short-term supply chain disruptions to Eastern Europe and Asia, caused by the war in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> With roughly 34 tonnes in 2022, the Iberian Peninsula remained the second-largest gateway for cocaine entering Europe with the ports of Valencia and Algeciras (Spain), as well as Setubal (Portugal) the most affected. The growing supply and new maritime

routes from Latin American ports to ports in the Mediterranean increase the risk of cocaine trafficking in the south of Europe, impacting most of the ports in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, turning the region into a cocaine hub between Europe and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup>

In 2022, the Western Mediterranean continued to be heavily impacted by cannabis resin smuggling. Organised hashish smuggling to the European shores relied on a well-functioning criminal infrastructure, which could be used for the trafficking of almost anything on demand, from people to illicit commodities. The main *modus operandi* remains the trafficking of hashish bundles with the use of speed boats and collecting abandoned bundles on the shores or floating in the coastal areas. Transshipment hotspots in West Africa, the Canary Islands and the Azores were also used by organised crime groups to diversify trafficking routes to Europe of cocaine, hashish, and other drugs.

Over the past number of years, hashish was further trafficked across the EU for markets in Eastern Europe and Asia. Increased security along the Eastern land borders, following the migration crisis on the EU's external borders with Belarus and the war in Ukraine, reduced the chances of smuggling of drugs in

1 JORA, 2022, Results from Frontex-coordinated joint operations

2 EUROSUR, 2022, Member States' single event reporting

3 JORA, 2022, Results from Frontex-coordinated joint operations

4 Open sources: dutchnews.nl, 10.01.2023, Less cocaine seized in Rotterdam but more was found in Antwerp

5 EUROSUR, Apr 2022, 3.5 tonnes of cocaine seized at Muuga Port

6 Open sources: insightcrime.org, 22.06.2022, Türkiye: Cocaine Hub Between Europe and the Middle East

the region and in 2022, there were only a few reports of seized hashish destined for the Russian market.

Heroin was reportedly trafficked mostly by land with countries along the Balkan route and in the Western Balkan region most affected. Concealment of heroin in road cargo has been the preferred *modus operandi* of criminal networks. After a short fall off in activity in the pandemic year 2020, the following two years saw an upswing in heroin flows through Iran and Türkiye towards southeast Europe, amid growing indications that Afghan refugees were being forced to carry drugs across the Iranian-Turkish border.<sup>7</sup> Despite the Taliban's pledge to crackdown on narcotics, Afghanistan's drug trade remained strong in 2022. Afghanistan's good connections to regional and global drug markets allow for diversified routes of maritime heroin trafficking from Indian and Pakistani ports to different ports in the EU. This interpretation is based on the fact that large quantities of heroin were seized in 2021 and 2022 at EU seaports,<sup>8</sup> revealing a well-functioning logistical network for distributing the drugs inside Europe. In addition, constant reports from EU airports of heroin smuggled by passengers flying from African countries indicates continuous activities along the southern heroin route.

Seizures of various drugs have been regularly reported to Frontex, mostly smuggled on commercial flights. The big international airports in Europe register frequent inflow and transit of drugs concealed in passengers' luggage, postal packages and air cargo. Beside regular cocaine seizures on air routes from Latin America (around 1.8 tonnes) and heroin seizures on flights from African countries, various synthetic drugs, including amphetamine, methamphetamine and ketamine, were reported, most of the time either exported from or transiting

7 Open sources: Al-monitor.com, 01.06.2022, Traffickers use refugees to smuggle drugs from Iran to Türkiye

8 JORA, May 2022, 2.6 tonnes of heroin seized at the Port of Rotterdam

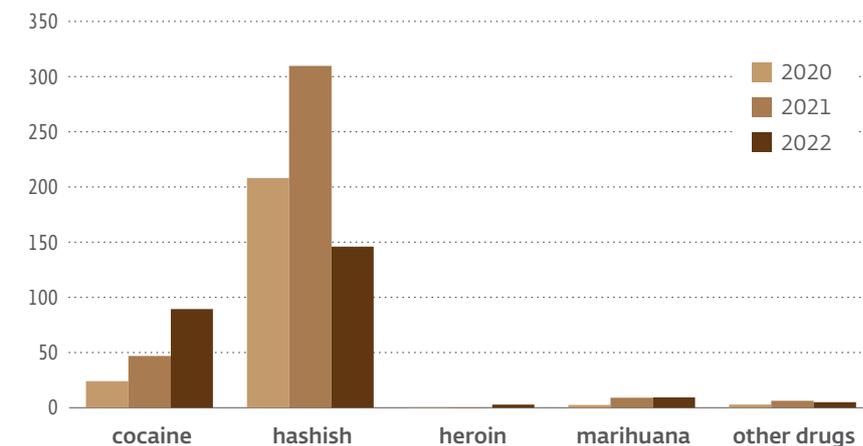


Figure 13. Drug seizures per drug type (tonnes)

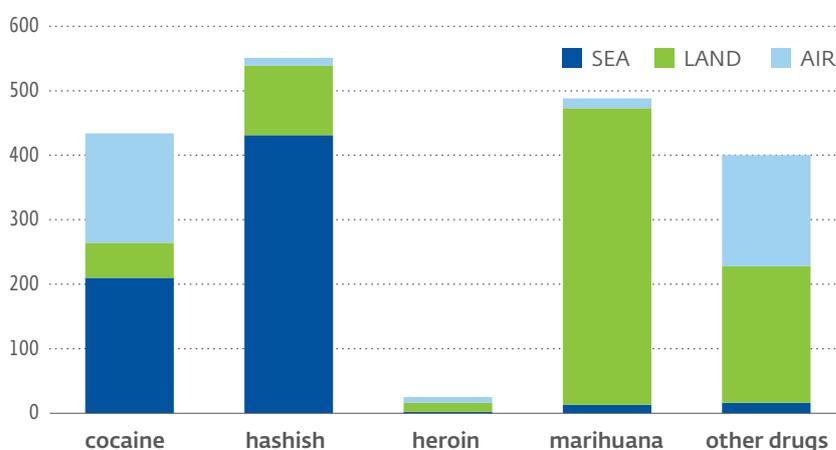


Figure 12. Drug incidents at the EU's external borders in 2022

through EU airports to final destinations in Asia, North America and Australia.

Looking forward, drug trafficking and related violence and crime impact the functioning of major transport and logistics infrastructure in Europe. Other security risks related to the war in Ukraine, as the overall migration pressure at the EU's external borders can cause temporary rerouting of drug supply in response to implemented law enforcement security measures.

The growing supply and stockpiling of cocaine and other drugs in Europe are likely to sustain the diversification of trafficking routes through different entry points from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea, as well as to turn Europe into a major distribution hub for supplying drugs to Asia and the Middle East. The rate at which drugs are imported into the EU via seaports in containers will be similar in 2023, with supplies most probably exceeding Europe's own demand.

Criminal networks will adapt their activities to the changing security landscape related to the war in Ukraine. Disrupted land and sea routes due to military actions or imposed economic sanctions will likely lead to the intensification of smuggling along alternative routes, increasing the risk of maritime drug trafficking to ports in the Mediterranean and the North Sea.

Synthetic drug production in Eastern Europe might also see new developments, as long-term disruption of manufacturing and distribution might force criminal networks to relocate their criminal business away from war-inflicted regions.

Online trade in drugs and direct arrangements between Europe-based criminal networks and drug producers are expected to continue, including the involvement of legal business structures. Air cargo and courier services will be preferred for the anonymised distribution of drugs to customers.

# Firearms smuggling

In 2022, border authorities seized numerous weapons – primarily cold arms or prohibited pepper sprays and stun guns, but also firearms and ammunition – during border checks. All border types were affected. These attempts typically involved persons smuggling prohibited weapons intended for either personal use or protection rather than being associated with large-scale arms trafficking.

Small-scale detections of weapons have rebounded since 2020 following the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions, a trend that continued in 2022. 2021 was marked by some major seizures at the land borders. Such irregular major shipments were not reported in 2022. Based on Member States’ reporting a total of 170 firearms (and more than 220 essential parts of firearms) were smuggled last year. The number of seized weapons (the same is valid for ammunition) decreased while detections increased at all border types. Cases where firearms were accessible for the smugglers and ready to use during the border check were rarely detected. Weapons were mostly hidden in the vehicle or in luggage.

Due to the war in Ukraine, large quantities of, *inter alia*, military grade weapons are uncontrolled there. With the

intensifying proliferation of firearms, explosives and ammunition, more and more of these unregistered firearms and military equipment will likely enter the illegal market. Crime groups in the region will not only arm up but also smugglers will most likely take advantage of the opportunity. The extent to which such weapons are smuggled across borders depends on how long the conflict persists and the general security situation in Ukraine, local demand for such equipment, as well as control measures at the borders. This conflict might generate a long-lasting effect like those seen in other post-conflict zones and has the potential to completely transform the patterns of illicit firearms flows in Europe once hostilities are over.

During 2022, detections of smuggled weapons and ammunition at the border with Ukraine continued at a low rate. Most of these cases were related to single, often non-lethal, weapons or seizures of ammunition (for civilian weapons) transported in both directions through the BCPs in the travellers’ luggage. Most cases were not connected to smuggling activities but rather constituted individual cases where persons brought along a weapon for personal protection.

Türkiye, known as a major source of blank firing weapons, which can be converted into live-firing firearms, will likely remain a source of trafficking. The Western Balkan region, long renowned as a source of post conflict weapons, is also increasingly seen as a transit area for firearms from Türkiye.

Larger quantities of firearms are usually trafficked aboard vessels. 2022 was however characterised by minor detections at sea, mostly reported by customs authorities.

The likelihood of arms and ammunition contraband being detected at airports is generally high due to security checks of passengers, luggage and cargo. While during the COVID-19 pandemic the number of seizures on international flights was reduced by travel restrictions, two-thirds of all cases of firearms and ammunition seizures in 2022 were reported at airports. This is partly based on well-established reporting mechanisms at airports, but also due to frequent seizures of weapons, their parts or ammunition in small parcel and courier shipments.

Firearms are not only a commodity, they are also a tool for criminals. It is no longer only drug traffickers, who try to

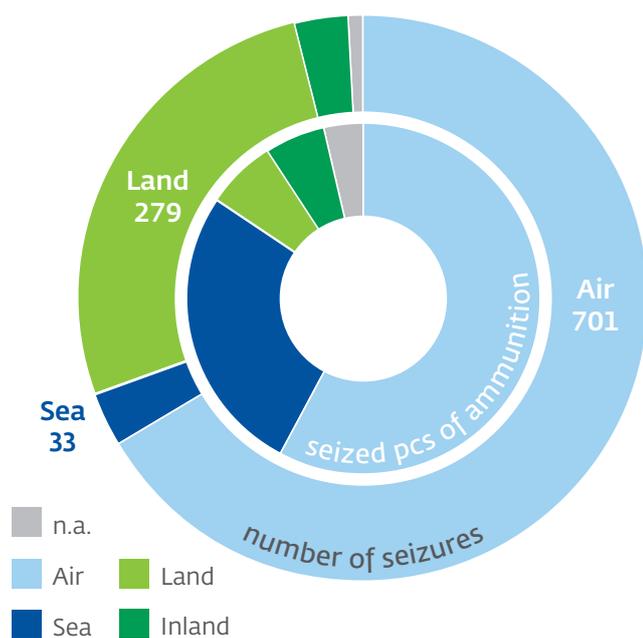


Figure 14. Ammunition seized / seizures in 2022

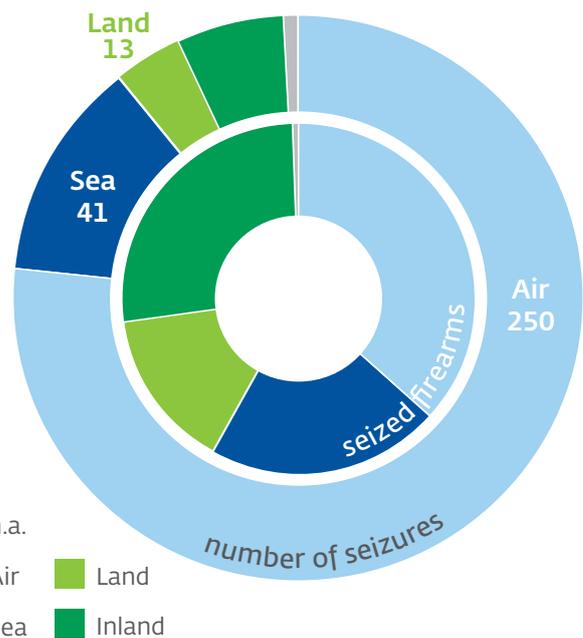


Figure 15. Firearms seized / seizures in 2022 (incl. essential parts)

protect their valuable contraband, but also other perpetrators who are arming up. Migrants frequently claim that smugglers are armed, especially along the Western Mediterranean and the Western Balkan routes. An increased level of violence among irregular migrants has been reported. There have been several instances recorded when migrants and people smugglers have used weapons against police officers and border guards: a threat that will likely increase in relevance in the future.

Looking forward, developments on the EU's external borders will reflect global trends. Even when most attention is focused on firearms from crisis regions, smugglers can be expected to further explore existing loopholes, such as the conversion of non-lethal weapons. Technological developments including 3D-printing make it unnecessary to smuggle complete weapons. Single parts are much harder to detect and this approach even enables to create untraceable<sup>1</sup> or more lethal weapons. The response to such specific developments needs besides the comprehensive exchange of information, a holistic approach in risk assessment and profiling, specialised training and finally sufficient detection equipment.

Besides the expected higher availability of illicit firearms, the illicit market will increasingly offer more modern weaponry. Ultimately, military grade weapons could make their way into the hands of criminals or terrorists.

Rising inflation and economic difficulties experienced by large shares of populations will increase the likelihood that firearms held – legally or illegally – by civilians and small businesses

<sup>1</sup> Ghost weapons: do-it-yourself, homemade weapons made from unregistered, illegally manufactured parts, and components, which can be purchased legally in external markets.

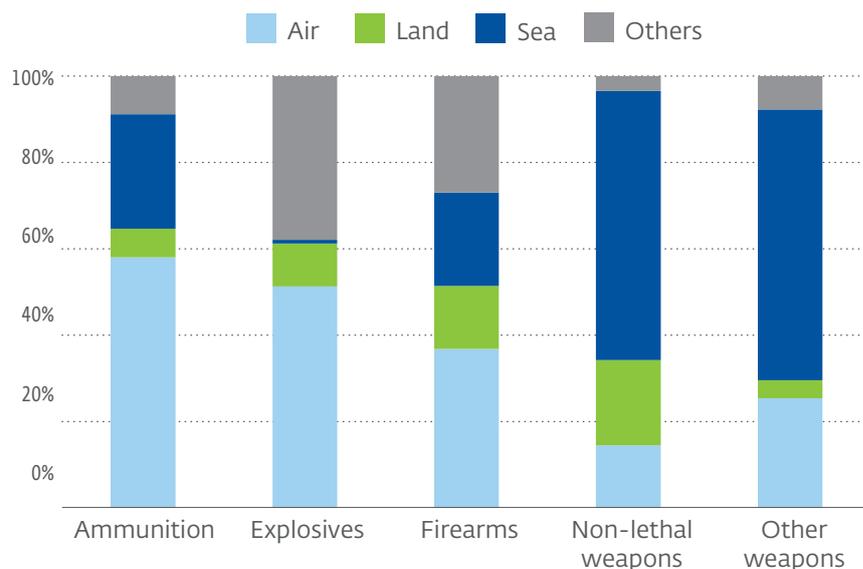


Figure 16. Distribution of categories seized weapons by border type (in 2022)

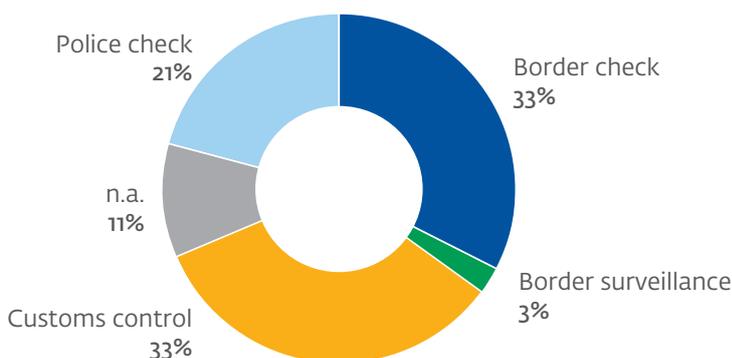


Figure 17. Weapon-related seizures in 2022 by type of control activity

might end up in criminal circles. The increased availability of firearms coupled with a continuous demand by criminals and a society feeling more insecure will drive the black market resulting in an increased threat to border security from trafficking, most likely through the land borders.

Illegal firearms are an enabler for other criminal activities such as drug trafficking and amplify the threat they pose to the internal security of the EU. Armed criminals and violent crimes

carried out using illegal firearms create a sense of insecurity and undermine public confidence in the rule of law. Moreover, once they start being illegally circulated, firearms pose a lifetime risk due to their longevity. Besides the general threat caused by the illegal possession of weapons, the impact of this phenomenon is demonstrated by recent attacks against border guards and the past use of such contraband for acts of organised crime and terrorism.

# Detection of stolen vehicles and parts

Motor vehicle crime in the EU is one of the property crimes with a continuous impact on the EU’s external borders through the smuggling of stolen vehicles and document fraud. The high number of alerts in the Schengen Information System for vehicles sought for the purpose of seizure or use as evidence in criminal proceedings, as well as the level of logistical support revealed during law-enforcement investigations, highlight the engagement of organised crime groups in motor vehicle crime.

In 2022, EU Member States and third countries reported to Frontex a total of 629 cases related to the seizure of 670 stolen vehicles. In particular, Frontex-coordinated joint operations accounted for 416 stolen vehicles (304 at the EU’s external borders and 112 in third countries in southeast Europe), which represented a twofold year-on-year increase of seizures during Frontex operational activities. Additionally, 33 cases of smuggling of stolen car parts and 122 cases of vehicle-related document fraud (mostly at the EU’s eastern land borders) were registered.<sup>1</sup> Border control and surveillance activities in EU Member States resulted in additional reports for 254 stolen vehicles, seized either at the EU’s external borders (129) or at internal borders and inland (125).<sup>2</sup>

Most of the detected stolen cars were driven (92%) or towed on a trailer (6%) through land BCPs. Often, stolen vehicles and parts were also found inside semitrailers or cargo vans. Despite fewer in number, seizures at seaports of vehicles and parts concealed in containers, had a big financial impact, considering the large volume of smuggled goods. Stolen cars are exported or disassembled into parts within the first few hours following the theft. Alternatively, the vehicles are moved to warehouses or abandoned in remote locations, often in neighbouring EU Member States,

awaiting new registration documents and licence plates.

The majority of detections referred to stolen passenger cars of various makes and models (76%). Utility vehicles, e.g., cargo vans, accounted for 9%, and lorries and semitrailers for 8% of the seized vehicles. Construction and agricultural machinery, motorcycles and electric scooters, camper vans, as well as outboard motors were also among the stolen commodities detected at the borders.

The common reason for detection was a SIS II or Interpol hit (68%). Nevertheless, document fraud was also detected in most of the stolen vehicle cases, including VIN manipulation and forged or counterfeit vehicle registration documents and licence plates.

In 2022, the main impact of stolen vehicle smuggling was on exit from the EU at land BCPs on the main transport corridors. Based on SIS II and Interpol alerts<sup>3</sup>, many of the European vehicles were stolen from countries in the north and west of Europe, but countries in the south of Europe on the way of the export routes of stolen vehicles were equally impacted. Detections at seaports mostly included stolen passenger vehicles and lorries boarding ferries. Yet, incidental

reports revealed the containerised import and transit of cargo with stolen vehicles and spare parts from North American and Asian countries, as well as the export of stolen cars to West African countries.

In 2022, the Eastern land borders, which reported 44% of all detections of stolen vehicles to Frontex, continued to be the most impacted. The number of cases involving the trafficking of stolen vehicles to countries in southeast Europe doubled compared to the previous year, reaching 241 seizures. The northern part of the eastern land borders experienced a fivefold surge in vehicle-related document fraud, mostly related to the use of false vehicle registration documents and licence plates. Increased passenger flows, as a consequence of the refugee crisis in Ukraine, was used by smugglers to try to drive stolen cars out of the EU, often using the genuine registration details of another vehicle of the same make and model. Female drivers of stolen cars, who accounted for 8% of the known persons, were also increasingly detected, due to the changed characteristics of general passenger flows through the BCPs as a consequence of the war in Ukraine.

The Western Balkans were impacted by the frequent detection of stolen vehicles at the land and sea borders and on ferries, with the number of detections doubling year-on-year totalling roughly 33% of the incidents in 2022. Changing

3 Countries-initiators of the SIS II and Interpol alerts on the vehicles reported to Frontex. In 22% of the detections, the initiator of the SIS II/Interpol alert was not reported.

1 JORA, 2022, Results from Frontex-coordinated joint operations  
 2 EUROSUR, 2022, Information from MS reports

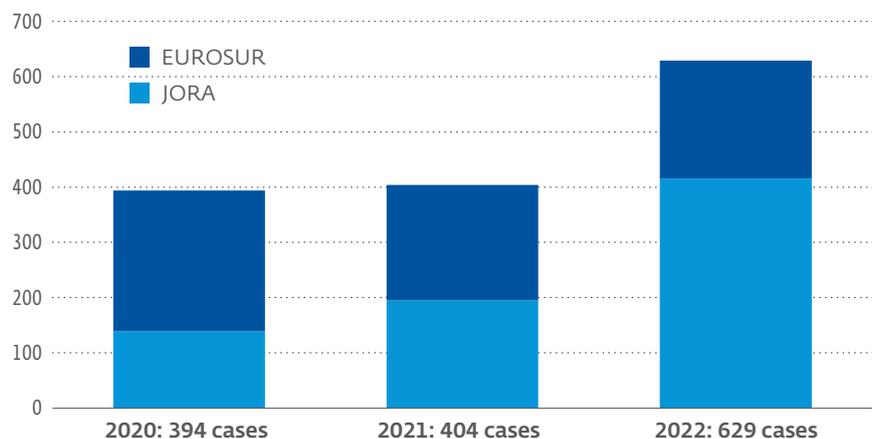


Figure 18. Detections of stolen vehicles

drivers and transport means on different legs of the journey across Europe was a typical *modus operandi*, which also included the use of software manipulation techniques and false documents and licence plates.

The smuggling of stolen vehicles has had a moderate but at the same time constant impact on the security of the EU's borders, given that the stolen vehicles were rarely used for committing other crimes at the borders but mostly as a means of transport. The expertise of border guards in vehicle-related document fraud is essential for tackling motor vehicle crime. Deprioritised motor vehicle crime amid other serious security concerns at the borders might also impact the capacity of border guards in terms of manpower and expertise to detect stolen vehicles.

Looking forward, incentivised by the increased demand for mobility, caused by both post-COVID-19 business reopening and large movements of people induced by the war in Ukraine, criminal groups will try to maximise their profits by stealing popular cars and equipment. The growing prices of new and used vehicles, as a result of supply issues and pricier components for car manufacturers, will likely add to the high demand, despite predictions of an economic recession.

The different pace of electric vehicle adoption and future restrictions on the production of polluting internal combustion engines in the EU Member States will also modify the market of used vehicles and parts in the long-term, creating new opportunities for organised crime.

In 2023, the immediate export of stolen vehicles out of the EU through land BCPs, will most likely be the preferred *modus operandi*. The trafficking of dismantled vehicles concealed in cargo with the aim of reassembling the same or similar vehicles in the country of destination is expected to continue. Moreover,

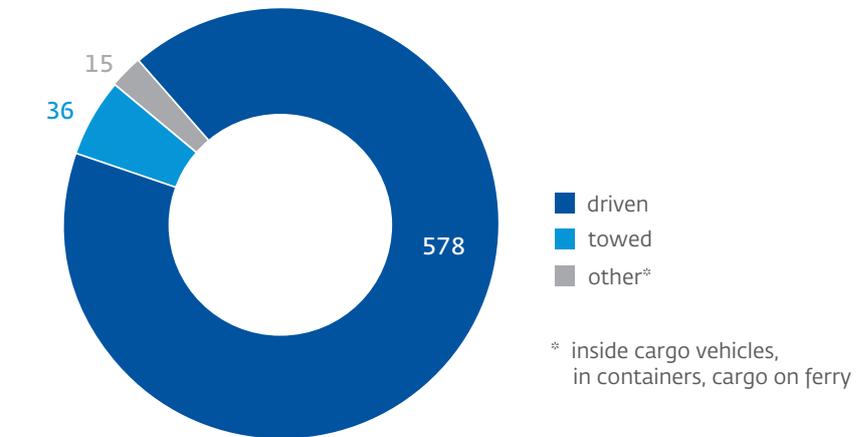


Figure 19. Method of transport of stolen vehicles

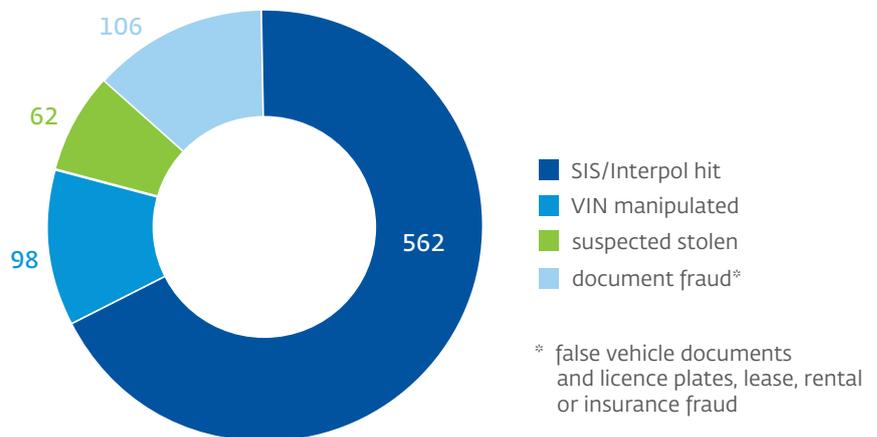


Figure 20. Reason for detection of stolen vehicles

the online trading of stolen vehicles and vehicle parts is expected to rise in the coming years, as it provides anonymity and reduces the risk for the criminals. False documents, including counterfeit cargo declarations and stolen blank registration documents will be used, especially when exporting stolen vehicles at seaports.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has caused widespread destruction of personal property and public infrastructure, is likely to generate demand for various types of vehicles and equipment. With the rising number of damaged cars in Ukraine, it can be anticipated that

criminals will misuse genuine Ukrainian vehicle registration documents and licence plates to traffic stolen vehicles of the same make and model.

It is expected that criminal groups might try to take advantage of the growing needs in various economic sectors like construction, energy supply, transport, and agriculture in countries recovering from social and political crises and armed conflicts (e.g. Ukraine), which can cause a rise in thefts, document fraud and smuggling attempts related to industrial equipment and construction machines.

# Tobacco smuggling

Significant price differences between Member States and neighbouring countries are the main drivers for smuggling of cigarettes. This profitable criminal activity is depriving governments of substantial tax revenue and generates enormous proceeds for organised crime groups enabling other illicit businesses.

According to a 2023 study<sup>1</sup>, the European market for illicit cigarettes (8.2% of total consumption) continued to increase in 2022 – despite a decline in general consumption and driven by eased border restrictions post-COVID-19 – summing up to 35.8 bn counterfeit and contraband cigarettes (+0.7%). Had these cigarettes been legally purchased an additional 11.3 bn Euros in taxes would have been raised.

Travel restrictions (COVID-19 based or enhanced border management on the borders with Belarus and Russia) made smuggling riskier and forced crime groups to adapt their tactics, to increase their production capacity of illicit tobacco in the EU and to resort to the use of postal shipments. In response, border

authorities have invested in detection technology, while a more analytical and cooperative response has led to high profile raids and seizures.

Hundreds of millions of seized illicit cigarettes were only one side of smuggling, tobacco intended for illicit production and counterfeit or contraband waterpipe tobacco are another commodity used. Tobacco smuggling took many forms along the border, from small-scale shipments being hidden in vehicles to larger-scale consignments being clandestinely transported over the green border. Fake shipments for the purpose of concealing tobacco products and the use of modern technology are increasingly part of the portfolio of smuggling activities.

Member States reported a further significant increase in smuggling activities in 2022, with 343 million cigarettes seized at the external borders (+22%). Large-scale, organised cigarette smuggling activities were detected at all border types. The overall reported volume of seizures, which also includes contraband seized beyond the external borders, was 691 million cigarettes and 745 tonnes of tobacco. These numbers merely represent the visible part of this illicit business.

The **land border** remained the most affected in terms of the total volume of seizures. Almost 70% of tobacco, and as much as 71% of cigarettes seized at the external borders were apprehended at land borders, mostly on entry.

The volume of individual seizures increased in 2022. There was no general trend, as the *modus operandi* varied from region to region. The external land borders with Belarus and Ukraine were the most targeted in 2022. Due to enhanced technical border protection along parts of the green borders contraband was increasingly blended in with the flow of goods, hidden in lorries and cargo trains. The use of drones or GPS-tracked rafts in rivers became part of smugglers' adjusted portfolio of *modi operandi*, in response to enhanced technical border surveillance means.

In the remaining areas the detection of large, bulky packages being smuggled across the border **on foot** was frequently reported. Such incidents were usually committed by smaller local groups, with drivers picking up the contraband on the EU side.

According to Europol, large-scale smuggling in shipping containers, often from the Far East, targets major seaports

<sup>1</sup> KPMG, Illicit cigarette consumption in the EU, UK, Norway and Switzerland – 2022 results, 2023

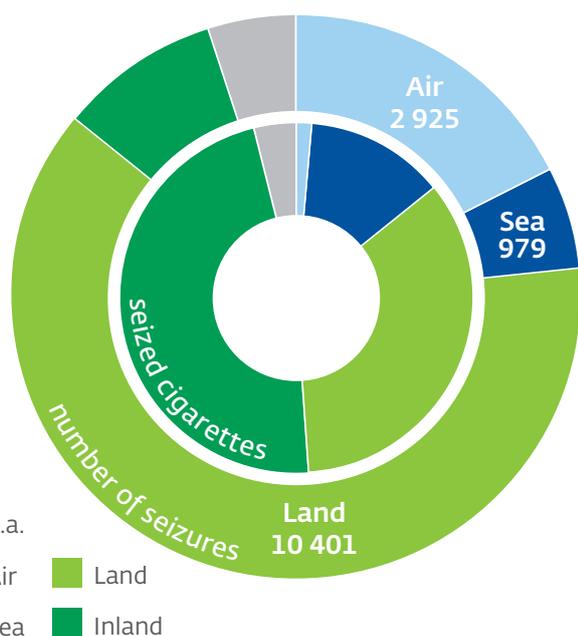


Figure 21. Smuggled cigarettes seized/seizures in 2022

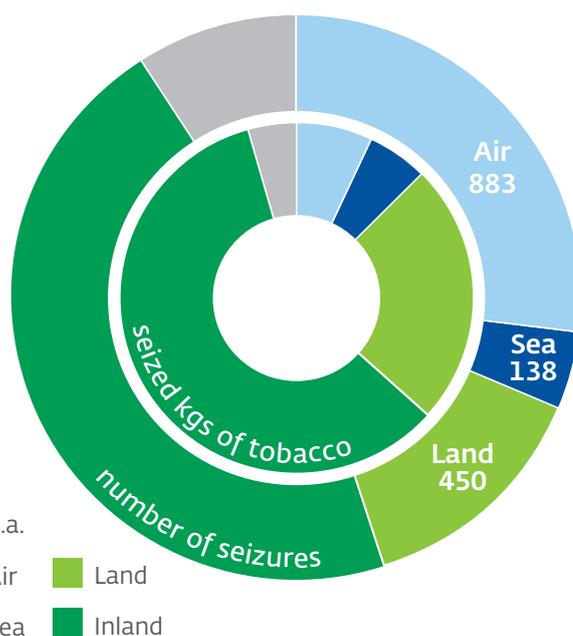


Figure 22. Smuggled tobacco seized/seizures in 2022

and free economic zones before entering the EU. Such contraband was either smuggled to the EU directly or through ports in neighbouring third countries before they get shipped by road. Due to high consumer prices on the British Isles, this region is a high-profit market for contraband (not only tobacco products) originating from and transiting the EU. In 2022, the number of illicit cigarettes seized at the EU's sea borders accounted for 26% of the total volume of cigarette/tobacco smuggling. Besides another increase in volume, this border type registered the strongest increase in detections in the past year (+372%).

In most Member States the volume of seized cigarettes and tobacco at air borders increased in 2022 with increasing passenger numbers. Contraband concealed in passengers' luggage continued to be the main method, especially in southwest Europe, while some airports report on significant smuggling activities using air mail or shipments.

Looking forward, criminal groups continuously prove that they are highly flexible, and are able to adapt to new situations. The economic downturn coupled with high inflation have further strained the financial situation of many households. This has created the conditions for OCGs to further exploit public demand for cheap goods. Besides high profits, much lighter consequences than in the case of smuggling other illicit goods will contribute to the attractiveness of this phenomenon.

Even though general consumption is decreasing, inflation eroded purchasing power will likely fuel a European black market, with smugglers striving to take a large share. Even considering increased illicit inland production, the smuggling of different tobacco products and other components will likely be a continuous threat. This threat will further materialise along the land borders of the EU, especially in the East, in major seaports and, to a lesser extent, at air borders.

Tobacco producers from outside the EU have an active interest in meeting the demand of a growing European black market. This especially applies to

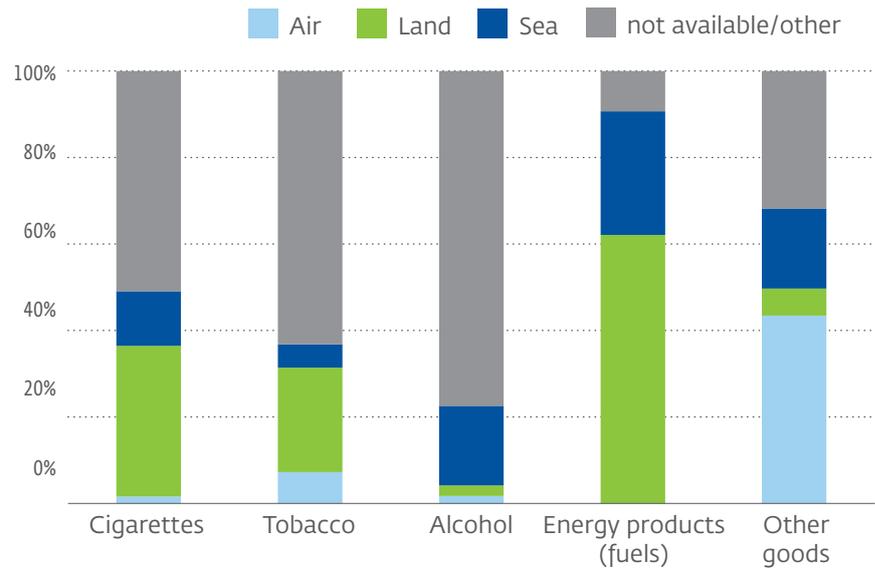


Figure 23. Distribution of categories of seized excise goods by border type (in 2022)

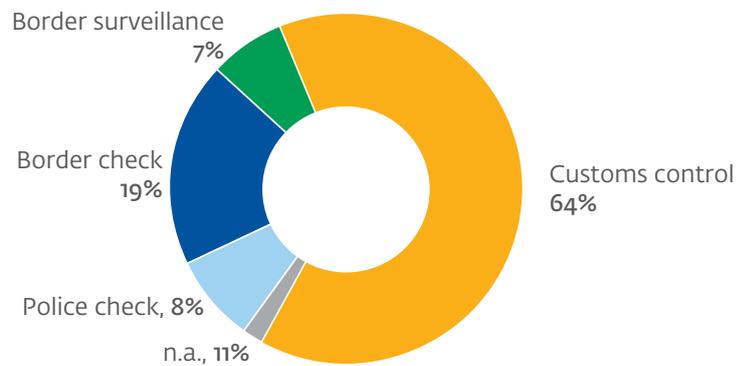


Figure 24. Excise good related seizures in 2022 by type of control activity

Chinese companies who are fast expanding into new countries. The occupied regions of Ukraine became a base for suspicious tobacco producers and traders after hostilities began in 2014. Thus, imported or locally produced cigarettes are, due to their low price, even more profitable for smugglers. Any development in the conflict will likely have an influence on smuggling on the EU's external borders. Meanwhile, shipments from the Far East will target other harbours. A high level of volatility in smuggling routes is expected in the future.

Smugglers adaptability goes hand in hand with the use of modern technologies. New ways of concealments and the use of advanced drones and GPS-tracked/controlled shipments will require an adequate response in terms of border control and surveillance capacities.

Besides constituting a burden on border management and environmental

consequences, smuggled tobacco products directly impact customers' health especially through sub-standard counterfeit cigarettes. Based on research by the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>2</sup>, tobacco is one of the biggest public health threats. Annually more than 8 million people worldwide get killed by active consumption or exposure. Furthermore, each year, smuggling activities cause substantial losses in Member States' budgets (estimated at more than EUR 11 bn in taxes annually, not considering costs for the health system or due to illegal labour in trade and production). At the same time the revenue and profits derived from the contraband are used to bolster organised crime and are considered a catalyst for other criminal activities.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

# Trafficking in human beings

The European Union is both a source region of victims of trafficking in human beings (THB) and an important destination for trafficked persons originating from third countries. Based on Eurostat data for 2021, 41% of the reported THB victims were non-EU nationals. Sexual exploitation (56%) remained the prevailing form of trafficking in the EU, followed by labour exploitation (29%). Other reported types of exploitation included forced crime, forced begging, benefit fraud, and removal of organs. Women and girls comprised the largest group of identified THB victims (68%), both among the EU and non-EU nationals. There is a strong correlation between the sex of the victims and the purpose of trafficking. The great majority of victims of sexual exploitation were females (87%), of which 27% were girls under the age of 18. By contrast, 66% of the victims of forced labour were male.<sup>1</sup>

The increased migration flows in 2022 also raised the risk of exploitation of vulnerable people on the move. In general, direct forms of abuse, e.g., use of threat or force during smuggling activities, are easier to identify, but more subtle ways of coercion can be less obvious and difficult to detect. Moreover, victims might be unaware that they are trafficked, which makes the detection of THB at the borders even harder.

The nationality composition of THB victims in Europe has been changing dynamically, often following the developments of humanitarian crises around the world. Despite the lower numbers of non-EU victims reported in the past few years (mostly due to COVID-19 travel restrictions), available data indicate that persons arriving via migratory routes from North and West Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East and the Western Balkans have been at continuous risk of labour and sexual exploitation.

According to Eurostat data, there were over 7 000 THB victims identified in 2021, which was in line with the trend

of the previous years. However, the actual number of victims was likely much higher than the reports suggested, as these statistics only capture victims that become known to the registering entities, and so many victims go undetected. For example, just one recent international investigation supported by Europol revealed a criminal network involved in forced prostitution of hundreds of Chinese women across Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the overall decline in registered cases, in 2022, the hidden forced prostitution of victims from African countries in Europe most likely continued at an unchanged level. Countries of first registration of African migrants in the south of Europe, as well as EU Member States in Western Europe remain top destinations for human trafficking. North Africa is perceived as the main trafficking hub of African THB victims experiencing sexual and labour exploitation in countries of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. For example, over the last several years Nigerian, Congolese, Cameroonian and other African women among the migrants arriving in Cyprus and countries in south-east Europe were reportedly trafficked by violent African criminal groups and ended up forced into prostitution in private apartments, bars, and nightclubs.

Institutional instability and militarisation of the societies in countries with

long-lasting conflicts have been generating economic inequalities and security threats, which are among the main reasons for large population displacements. In turn, displacements in the wake of military conflicts and socio-political turmoil expose members of vulnerable groups to the influence of organised crime. In 2022, long-lasting conflicts in the Middle East and Africa remained in the shadow of the ongoing war in Ukraine, yet the abuse of rights of women and children from these regions continue to be of great concern. Moreover, while migrant smuggling is a distinct criminal phenomenon, it subjects the irregular migrants and refugees to various forms of abuse and creates big profit opportunities for criminal networks.

In 2022, the Russian aggression against Ukraine significantly changed the nationality composition of refugees arriving in the EU. According to UNHCR, the total number of refugees worldwide rose by a record 35 per cent, or 8.9 million people, to reach 34.6 million at the end of 2022.<sup>3</sup> More than half of that number were Syrians, Venezuelans and Ukrainians, as the increase was largely driven by people fleeing the war in Ukraine. A further estimated 6.3 million people remained displaced within this country.

Separation from families and long journeys across several countries to reach safe destinations makes refugees and migrants vulnerable to violations of their rights such as sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced criminality, and forced begging. In 2022, the number of related incidents was kept low by efforts to

2 Open sources: Europol, 08.02.2023, 28 arrested as Europe's biggest Chinese prostitution ring is dismantled

3 Footnote: UNHCR, Global Trends Report 2022, Copenhagen, 14 June 2023

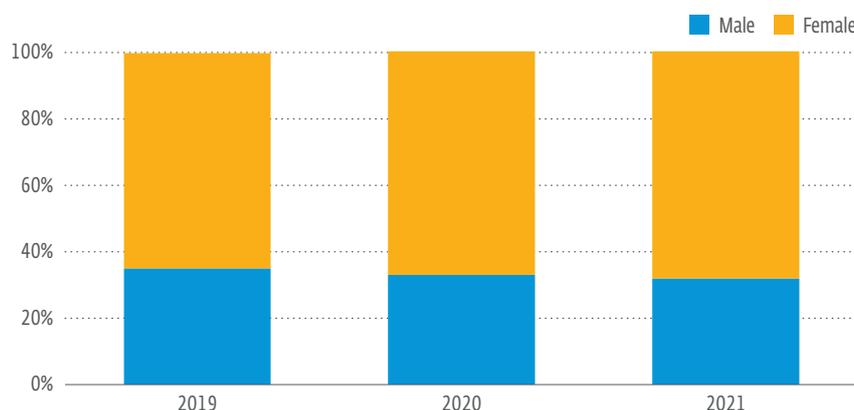


Figure 25. Gender of registered victims of THB in the EU

1 Eurostat, Trafficking in human beings statistics – Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

prevent forced prostitution of women and illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children, as well as the adequate care provided by foster institutions in the EU Member States. However, the risk of trafficking might be rising in view of an increasing number of casualties, both military and civilian, and of unparented children.

While the dimension of child trafficking often remains unknown, reported cases mostly involve sexual exploitation, forced begging, and forced crime. Based on Eurostat data, the share of children among the reported THB victims in Europe remains a worrying indicator, with many EU Member States registering high numbers of trafficked children in the EU.

Over the last few years, the majority of the children arrived in the EU with the migration flows along the sea routes, mostly in the Central Mediterranean, but also in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. The year 2022 was no exception, with around 35 000 children being reported among the irregular migrants, almost 16 000 of which were unaccompanied minors.

With the lack of legal pathways, the health and life of migrants are put in danger. This is especially true for children, who are among the most vulnerable. Migrant smuggling often places those involved in dire and inhumane conditions and can also result in different forms of exploitation of vulnerable people. Migrants are transported in unseaworthy boats through the Mediterranean and the English Channel or put in hidden compartments of road vehicles along land routes in the Balkans. Minors are also used as facilitators of other migrants crossing the external borders and making secondary movements, as they can count on lighter sentences when caught by law-enforcement authorities. It is also necessary to extend continuous care and support to child migrants who have already reached Europe, as unaccompanied minors are often exposed to the influence of criminal groups in their country of residence. For example, recent investigations in countries in Western Europe underlined the risk of minors either going missing or being coerced into crime.

Although the signs of trafficking at the borders become less obvious with the increasing use of internet for the recruitment of THB victims and the offering of facilitation services alike, the prevention

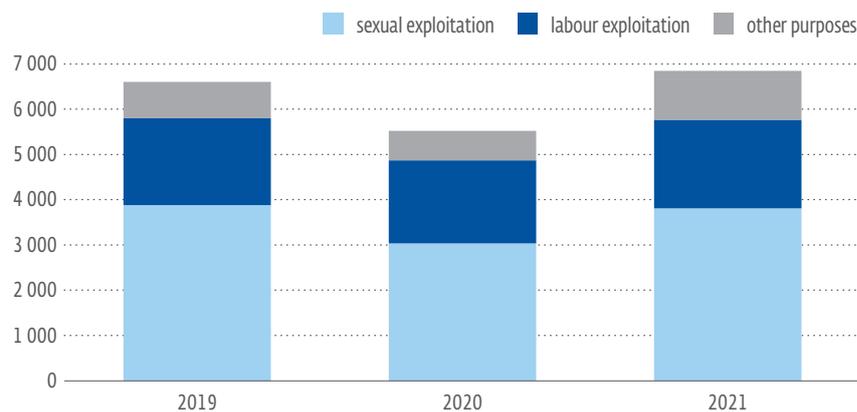


Figure 26. Number of registered victims of THB in the EU and form of exploitation

Source: Eurostat data as of February 2023

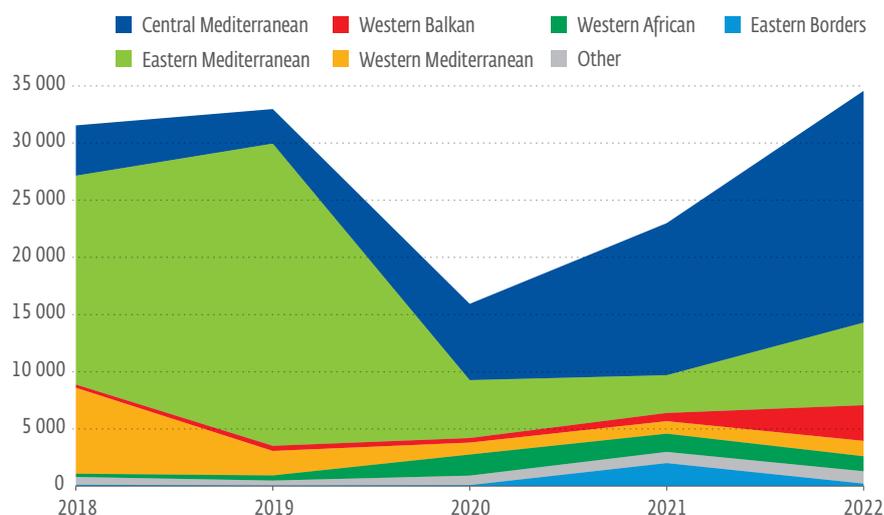


Figure 27. Detections of minors in the migration flows

Source: FRAN data as of 3 February 2023

measures at the borders remain important for reducing the risks for vulnerable persons. Constant monitoring of specific risk indicators is recommended, as well as cooperation of law enforcement with NGOs and cultural mediators for early identification and prevention of exploitation of vulnerable individuals among migrants and refugees.

Looking forward, long-lasting instability in Africa and the Middle East continue to generate regional population displacements and migration flows towards the EU. With limited institutional support to vulnerable people in conflict regions around the world as well as discrimination of women and children the risk of human trafficking will most likely persist. This pertains both to migrants in transit and those in destination countries.

Along with sexual exploitation, forced labour remains one of the main risks, especially for long-term displaced persons,

including the refugees from Ukraine. Criminal networks are likely to continue to take advantage of the war in Ukraine, inter alia attempting to lure women into prostitution and bring illegal workers from Ukraine to Europe. A rise in illegal practices is expected to occur in 2023 with a growing demand for seasonal workers in sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, construction, etc. The risk of child trafficking also remains high as OCGs might try to bring unaccompanied minors from Ukraine for the purpose of illegal adoption or various forms of exploitation.

As humanitarian crises and military conflicts increase the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe along the migratory routes, the risk of child exploitation significantly rises. As in the previous years, the high number of unaccompanied minors will be one of the main concerns for EU Member States in 2023.

# Terrorism

Terrorism has surged in parts of the African continent in recent years. Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates continue to take advantage of political and security vacuums to seep into tribal dynamics and open further 'jihadist' corridors southward e.g., coastal areas of West Africa. This comes as no surprise as some of the most dynamic ISIS and Al-Qaeda networks are currently operating in the area e.g. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) respectively.

Yet, at the time of writing, the threat posed by each of these affiliates seems to remain local/regional rather than global. This might be partly ascribed to intra-jihadist power struggles which continue to define the operational environment; a condition which may affect available resources – both in terms of 'will to fight', assets and manpower – by forcing groups to create safe havens and focus on short-term/immediate tactical gains.

ISIS cohesion among its operational nodes in the sub-Saharan region remains questionable and the resilience of Al-Qaeda offshoots' – like Al-Shabaab – makes Africa an existential battleground for ISIS. This seems to be confirmed by ISIS propaganda outlets' efforts to emphasise the unity of the movement despite setbacks faced in 2021.

Regardless, endemic violence in the Sahel is increasing displacements and – consequently – creating fertile ground for the criminal/terrorist milieu to strengthen their ties through the exploitation of the migratory flows for financial gains and/or recruitment.

The security context is further complicated by the ongoing military reconfiguration in the region – especially after the departure of French and other EU forces in 2022. In this sense, Russian

mercenaries' brutal counterinsurgency may likely jeopardise past counterterrorism efforts further exacerbating the spiral of violence and facilitating – in the long run – jihadists' recruitment purposes. That said, Africa also remains very attractive for former FTFs willing to relocate elsewhere following the territorial defeat of the Caliphate, or for EU would-be recruits aiming at joining militant factions in the region as demonstrated by some arrests made by EU security services in 2022.

In the Levant, the defeat of the territorial "caliphate" continues to force the remnants of ISIS to exploit governance and security vacuums in peripheral areas to pursue a low-level insurgency. Despite the loss of several senior figures in 2022, including two leaders, ISIS cadres continued to attack Kurdish-controlled prisons to replenish its ranks and reactivate its operational nodes across the Levant.

In northern Syria, recruitment efforts allegedly continue in internally displaced persons' camps and detention facilities. Here, a large population of ISIS fighters/dependents keep offering a population ripe for indoctrination and pose serious policy challenges for the international community. In this sense, the controlled repatriation of EU citizens from these locations might likely reduce the risk of them being co-opted again under the ISIS umbrella helping the Union to better manage security challenges.

In the medium/long term, militant groups – linked to Al-Qaeda and ISIS – may also have been emboldened by the reduction of Russian military engagement in the region following its war efforts in Ukraine. This could provide them with more space for manoeuvre, further strengthening avenues of cooperation

with criminal networks operating in the area.

In Ukraine, the situation on the ground remains complex and may further deteriorate. This could likely raise the number of IDPs (estimated by UNHCR at about 5 million in May 2023) and contribute to further movements towards the EU. The risk here for the internal security of the Union remains the undetected entry of high-risk individuals e.g., foreign fighters, their dependents and/or people who have committed war crimes mixing among the refugees fleeing Ukraine.

The large influx of firearms, ammunition, and explosives – which is likely to increase as the war drags on – has also raised concerns as it could incentivise the illicit trade of weapons with them ultimately ending up in the hands of terrorists in the EU.

As for Afghanistan, the situation remains complex; circumstances that may result in more people willing to leave the country to reach the EU. Given the deterioration of its public outreach especially after the recent crackdown on women's rights and freedoms, the Taliban administration risks finding itself further isolated internationally. Al-Zawahiri's elimination in Kabul in July 2022 confirmed the proximity of the establishment to al-Qaeda's core and their operational footprint in the country. Whilst the movement might not harbour short-term ambitions to strike internationally – mainly due to its lack of leadership and the need to hone its capabilities – it may nevertheless utilise the country to project power e.g., financial, and logistical support, and strategic directions. On the other hand, ISIS-K is not viewed as posing an immediate international threat as its primary

## The Salafi-Jihadi Movement in Africa

### Active insurgency

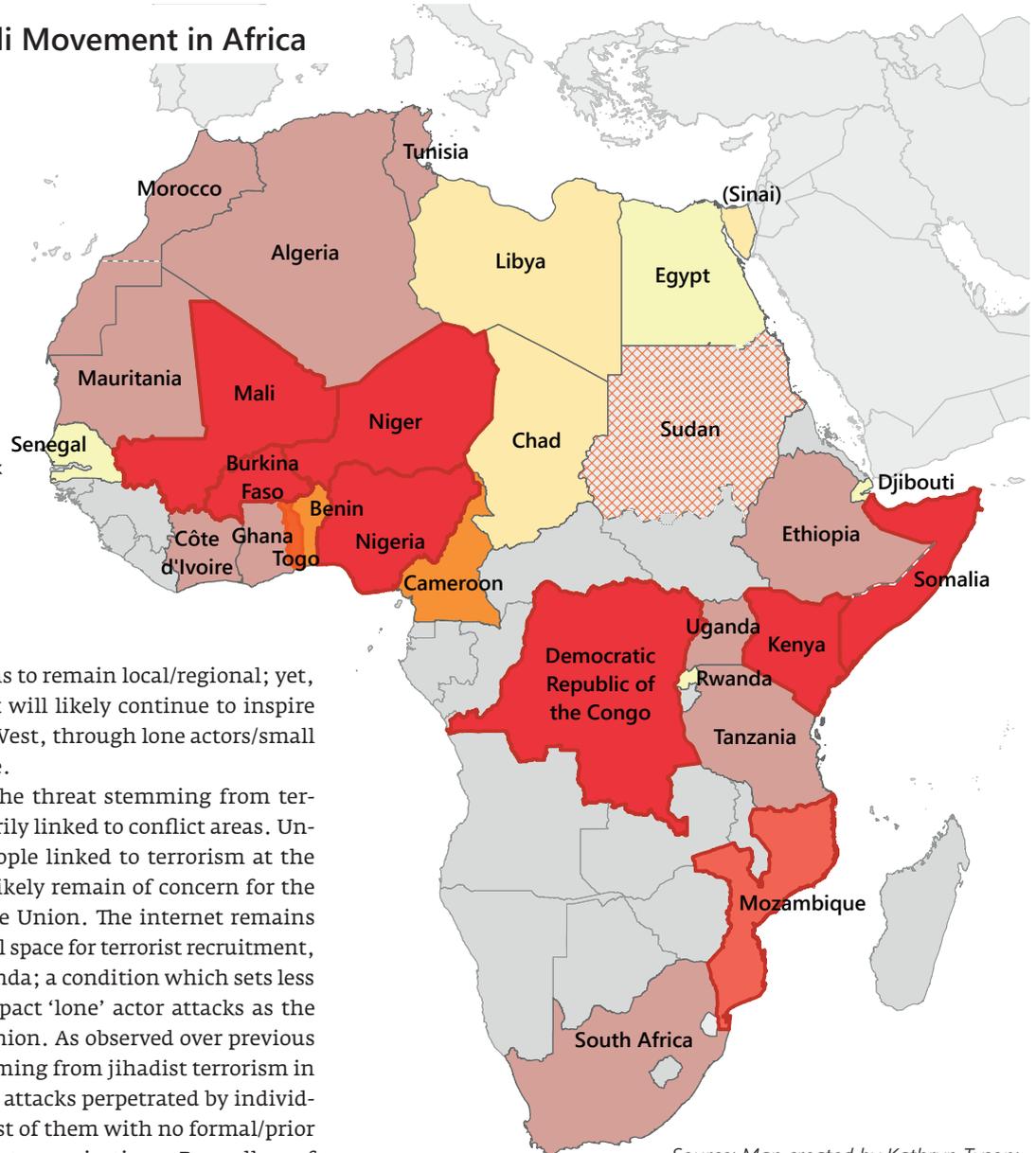
- Escalating
- Steady state

### Low-level insurgency

- Escalating
- Steady state
- Declining

- Attack cells present
- Assessed attack risk
- Transit zone

As of 5 July, 2023



operational focus seems to remain local/regional; yet, at the strategic level it will likely continue to inspire violent attacks in the West, through lone actors/small cells radicalised online.

Looking forward, the threat stemming from terrorism remains primarily linked to conflict areas. Undetected entries of people linked to terrorism at the external borders will likely remain of concern for the internal security of the Union. The internet remains the primary operational space for terrorist recruitment, training, and propaganda; a condition which sets less sophisticated/high impact ‘lone’ actor attacks as the primary risk for the Union. As observed over previous years, the threat stemming from jihadist terrorism in the EU materialised in attacks perpetrated by individuals acting alone – most of them with no formal/prior affiliation with terrorist organisations. Regardless of the operational success/affiliation of the perpetrator, these attacks will continue to represent a great propaganda boost for terrorist networks. Moreover, the EU will need to continue monitoring exits of violent extremists wishing to reach conflict areas as in the medium-term their battlefield experience might represent a risk for the internal security of the EU.

Source: Map created by Kathryn Tyson;  
Contributors: Brian Carter, Liam Karr, and Peter Mills  
© Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, 5 July, 2023.



# Outlook

## **Irregular migration to Europe expected to rise**

Irregular migration in 2023/2024 will likely continue the post-COVID-19 rebound observed in 2022, as socioeconomic push factors in numerous countries of origin are exacerbated by the global economic downturn and rising inflation. Refugee and migrant populations hosted in third countries to the east and south of Europe are becoming more unpopular with local people whose tolerance of foreigners is being strained by increasingly challenging socioeconomic conditions. Migrants and refugees also encounter hostile rhetoric from politicians trying to profit from such popular sentiments. New population displacements in Africa's Sahel region are pushing refugees towards the Mediterranean, in particular the Central Mediterranean route. These displacements are caused by the long-standing regional expansion of terrorist groups, widespread instability resulting from numerous conflicts – most recently the intense fighting in Sudan and the coup in Niger, as well as worsening food insecurity in East Africa. Meanwhile, the economic contraction in Europe may be milder than forecast, so pull factors could remain strong. In light of this, all migration routes are expected to remain active. Seasonality will have a lesser impact on sea routes than in previous years given the proliferation of larger, more seaworthy (but not safer) vessels. It is assessed that in line with these factors, the largest increases in irregular migration activity will be seen in the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic remains a latent concern for border management, as do threats to energy supplies, although at the time of writing both appear to be mitigated. Winter 2023-24 may be a challenge for energy infrastructure, and border infrastructure operations should be prepared for blackouts.

### **Potential for instrumentalization of migration on the eastern land border and beyond**

The war in Ukraine is likely to continue to have an outsized impact on European integrated border management (EIBM), both directly and indirectly via continuing repercussions in the economic,

security and political domains. It is conceivable that the war will not stay contained within Ukraine's borders and that, as a result of the prolonged war, Russian domestic stability is called into question.

The rapidly changing security architecture in Europe and beyond could lead to the deployment of a range of asymmetric or hybrid methods. Given the extent of hostility between Russia and the West and the reduced interdependence between them, the likelihood of the instrumentalization of migrants by Russia and Belarus has increased. Importantly, the instrumentalization of migrants may not only be limited to the eastern land borders as Russia's allies and proxies to the south and south-east could be leveraged.

Solid contingency planning of the Member States and EBCG as a whole is hence crucial for limiting the impact of instrumentalisated migration. Additionally, robust preparedness may also serve as a pre-empting factor that the planners of instrumentalisation of migration need to take into account. At the same time, acting in accordance with fundamental rights in the face of instrumentalisated migration demonstrates the steadfastness of European Union values.

### **Post-COVID-19 pandemic demand drives organised crime**

With a return to business-as-usual in the wake of the pandemic, 2022 saw upswings in many areas of cross-border crime, especially drug smuggling. However, due to the war in Ukraine and tighter security on the eastern land borders, smuggling in this region remained low. Until there is a change in the situation in Ukraine and a reduction in border security, drug smuggling on the eastern land borders is not expected to grow. We may, however, see criminal networks trying to infiltrate legal business in an attempt to overcome the restrictions.

Cocaine smuggling to North Sea and Mediterranean ports remains at the high level seen in the past two to three years, possibly contributing to stockpiles in Europe as supply is now estimated to exceed demand. Increased movements of cocaine and other drugs are therefore expected out of Europe to the Middle East and Asia.

Tobacco smuggling was also on the up. Given the increasing cost of living faced by much of Europe, it is likely that this trend will continue through 2023, as people turn to the black market as a source of cheaper cigarettes and other excise goods and contraband. Disruption to Ukraine-based illicit production and smuggling due to the war may have led to movements of production facilities and diverted smuggling routes.

New distribution technologies that aid the smuggling of illicit goods are likely to be increasingly used. These include encrypted online trade, courier services and the use of drones. Organised crime groups (OCGs) will continue to diversify their methods, which will require vigilance on the part of border, customs and law enforcement agencies/authorities, effective exchange of information, and openness to new methods and technologies to counter the threat.

The enormous numbers of firearms, ammunition and explosives currently in Ukraine pose a serious threat to EIBM and internal security. Firearms are a commodity traded by criminal gangs as well as a tool of their trade. While the war continues, however, it is expected that most firearms will remain in Ukraine. Problems are likely to arise when the fighting stops. Left-over weapons can easily fall into the wrong hands and become widely traded illegal commodities, even far into the future. This is a particular concern in the current climate of increasing incidents of smugglers and even migrants arming themselves and threatening law enforcement.

The war also has an impact on the market for stolen vehicles and machinery. The destruction of vehicles, industrial and agricultural machinery could lead to demand for cheap replacements, which could be exploited by criminal gangs. Using the genuine documentation of damaged machinery for a stolen item of the same model is a possible *modus operandi*.

In terms of trafficking in human beings, Europe's current labour shortage may lead to increased labour exploitation. The demand for low-skilled seasonal workers means that we may see a rise of this type of crime. The increasing number of unaccompanied minors arriving at Europe's external borders also remains a concern.

# Statistical annex

## Legend

**Symbols and abbreviations:** n.a. not applicable  
: data not available

**Source:** FRAN and EDF-RAN data as of 3 February 2023, RDC data as of 10 August 2023 unless otherwise indicated

**Note:** 'Member States' in the tables refer to FRAN Member States, including both 27 EU Member States and three Schengen Associated Countries.

### Annex Table 1. Illegal border-crossing between BCPs, on entry

Detections at the external borders by border type, gender and age group

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>							
							<b>Nationality</b>
Land	35 600	39 033	87 485	183 571	55	110	Syria (47%)
Sea	106 246	87 390	112 616	147 982	45	31	Egypt (15%)
<b>Gender</b>							
							<b>Nationality</b>
Female	32 987	10 781	16 916	26 446	8.0	56	Syria (21%)
Male	106 690	109 510	169 942	284 790	86	68	Syria (32%)
Not available	2 169	6 132	13 243	20 317	6.1	53	Egypt (23%)
<b>Age Group</b>							
							<b>Nationality</b>
Adult	96 947	86 362	119 517	165 205	50	38	Egypt (10%)
Minor	32 554	15 159	22 038	33 564	10	52	Afghanistan (15%)
Not available	4 009	3 522	4 762	3 183	1.0	-33	Morocco (35%)
Accompanied	23 542	5 996	6 391	14 572	4.4	128	Afghanistan (21%)
Unaccompanied	5 003	5 641	10 885	15 809	4.8	45	Egypt (28%)
Not available	12 345	24 902	58 546	132 784	40	127	Syria (60%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>141 846</b>	<b>126 423</b>	<b>200 101</b>	<b>331 553</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	

Annex Table 2. **Illegal border-crossing between BCPs, on entry**

Detections reported by border type and top ten nationalities at the external borders

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year
<b>All Borders</b>						
Syria	24 339	21 631	46 395	98 360	30	112
Afghanistan	34 154	10 140	16 711	36 031	11	116
Tunisia	2 799	13 185	16 527	25 260	7.6	53
Egypt	996	1 519	9 218	21 966	6.6	138
Bangladesh	2 254	5 426	9 041	17 535	5.3	94
Morocco	8 020	17 594	16 482	14 764	4.5	-10
Pakistan	3 799	2 603	3 863	12 764	3.8	230
Türkiye	7 880	3 947	4 673	12 087	3.6	159
Algeria	5 314	12 987	13 702	9 421	2.8	-31
Côte d'Ivoire	1 500	2 337	4 117	7 178	2.2	74
All Other	50 791	35 054	59 372	76 187	23	28
<b>Total all borders</b>	<b>141 846</b>	<b>126 423</b>	<b>200 101</b>	<b>331 553</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Land Border</b>						
Syria	7 546	18 697	43 149	86 868	47	101
Afghanistan	5 812	5 746	13 640	26 334	14	93
Türkiye	7 322	3 709	4 377	11 746	6.4	168
Pakistan	2 109	1 071	1 911	9 101	5.0	376
India	203	140	707	7 169	3.9	914
Tunisia	100	197	847	6 789	3.7	702
Ukraine	69	58	64	5 134	2.8	7 922
Nigeria	328	358	1 486	3 941	2.1	165
Congo (Kinshasa)	41	181	1 242	3 716	2.0	199
Morocco	197	674	1 468	3 459	1.9	136
All Other	11 873	8 202	18 594	19 314	11	3.9
<b>Total land borders</b>	<b>35 600</b>	<b>39 033</b>	<b>87 485</b>	<b>183 571</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Sea Border</b>						
Egypt	693	1 174	8 713	21 736	15	149
Tunisia	2 699	12 988	15 680	18 471	12	18
Bangladesh	868	4 539	7 955	15 580	11	96
Syria	16 793	2 934	3 246	11 492	7.8	254
Morocco	7 823	16 920	15 014	11 305	7.6	-25
Afghanistan	28 342	4 394	3 071	9 697	6.6	216
Algeria	5 089	12 719	13 342	9 140	6.2	-31
Côte d'Ivoire	1 462	2 310	4 009	7 094	4.8	77
Guinea	656	1 088	2 565	5 983	4.0	133
Unspecified sub-Saharan nationals	14 191	13 237	15 072	4 692	3.2	-69
All Other	27 630	15 087	23 949	32 792	22	37
<b>Total sea borders</b>	<b>106 246</b>	<b>87 390</b>	<b>112 616</b>	<b>147 982</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>31</b>

Annex Table 3. **Illegal border-crossing between BCPs, on entry**

Detections reported by routes and top three nationalities at the external borders

Routes	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year
<b>Western Balkan Route</b>	<b>15 152</b>	<b>26 969</b>	<b>61 735</b>	<b>144 197</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>134</b>
Syria	4 643	16 644	38 723	79 932	55	106
Afghanistan	5 338	5 251	12 297	23 409	16	90
Türkiye	623	155	1 652	8 836	6.1	435
All Other	4 548	4 919	9 063	32 020	22	253
<b>Central Mediterranean Route</b>	<b>14 003</b>	<b>35 673</b>	<b>67 724</b>	<b>105 561</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>56</b>
Egypt	267	1 124	8 506	21 336	20	151
Tunisia	2 690	12 985	15 675	18 465	17	18
Bangladesh	750	4 447	7 848	15 457	15	97
All Other	10 296	17 117	35 695	50 303	48	41
<b>Eastern Mediterranean Route</b>	<b>83 333</b>	<b>20 280</b>	<b>20 572</b>	<b>43 906</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Land</b>	<b>17 370</b>	<b>9 849</b>	<b>15 412</b>	<b>30 428</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>97</b>
Syria	2 897	2 031	3 938	6 793	22	72
Nigeria	328	356	1 443	3 933	13	173
Congo (Kinshasa)	41	181	1 201	3 605	12	200
All Other	14 104	7 281	8 830	16 097	53	82
<b>Sea</b>	<b>65 963</b>	<b>10 431</b>	<b>5 160</b>	<b>13 478</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>161</b>
Palestine <sup>A</sup>	3 223	314	660	2 791	21	323
Afghanistan	28 273	3 473	1 084	2 262	17	109
Syria	16 707	2 665	730	1 854	14	154
All Other	17 760	3 979	2 686	6 571	49	145
<b>Western African Route</b>	<b>2 718</b>	<b>24 087</b>	<b>22 351</b>	<b>15 463</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>-31</b>
Morocco	949	11 972	7 561	6 411	41	-15
Unspecified sub-Saharan nationals	1 709	11 230	14 749	4 608	30	-69
Unknown	0	0	0	1 164	7.5	n.a.
All Other	60	885	41	3 280	21	n.a.
<b>Western Mediterranean Route</b>	<b>23 969</b>	<b>17 370</b>	<b>18 466</b>	<b>15 134</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>-18</b>
<b>Sea</b>	<b>23 557</b>	<b>17 197</b>	<b>17 378</b>	<b>13 257</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>-24</b>
Algeria	4 007	11 195	11 659	7 734	58	-34
Morocco	6 336	3 775	5 228	4 307	32	-18
Syria	20	48	105	624	4.7	494
All Other	13 194	2 179	386	592	4.5	53
<b>Land</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>1 088</b>	<b>1 877</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>73</b>
Sudan	9	21	208	633	34	204
Mali	102	63	332	364	19	9.6
Guinea	76	33	131	292	16	123
All Other	225	56	417	588	31	41
<b>Eastern Borders Route</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>8 160</b>	<b>6 373</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>-22</b>
Ukraine	57	54	59	5 130	80	n.a.
Iraq	43	43	4 814	270	4.2	-94
Belarus	17	24	131	180	2.8	37
All Other	605	556	3 156	793	12	-75
<b>Circular Route from Albania to Greece</b>	<b>1 944</b>	<b>1 365</b>	<b>1 092</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>-36</b>
Albania	1 867	1 326	1 033	599	86	-42
India	16	4	10	17	2.4	70
Cuba	3	6	20	17	2.4	-15
All Other	58	29	29	63	9.1	117
<b>Black Sea Route</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>n.a.</b>
Afghanistan	0	0	0	69	32	n.a.
Somalia	0	0	0	48	23	n.a.
Iraq	0	0	0	44	21	n.a.
All Other	2	0	0	52	24	n.a.
<b>Other</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>900</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>141 846</b>	<b>126 423</b>	<b>200 101</b>	<b>331 553</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>

#### Annex Table 4. Clandestine entries at land and sea BCPs

Detections reported by border type, age group, gender and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>							
							<b>Nationality</b>
Land	2 119	1 823	2 480	1 614	96	-35	Afghanistan (35%)
Sea	431	464	141	66	3.9	-53	Syria (45%)
<b>Age Group</b>							
							<b>Nationality</b>
Adult	2 436	1 726	1 644	1 064	63	-35	Afghanistan (31%)
Minor	113	93	51	93	5.5	82	Syria (35%)
Not available	1	468	926	523	31	-44	Afghanistan (40%)
<b>Gender</b>							
							<b>Nationality</b>
Female	84	114	102	109	6.5	6.9	Syria (28%)
Male	2 464	2 170	2 516	1 571	94	-38	Afghanistan (35%)
Not available	2	3	3	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>							
Afghanistan	1 646	1 275	1 436	560	33	-61	
Syria	51	134	195	249	15	28	
Türkiye	49	51	113	174	10	54	
India	1	0	12	168	10	n.a.	
Pakistan	69	60	125	86	5.1	-31	
Kosovo*	9	39	64	82	4.9	28	
Morocco	45	125	104	76	4.5	-27	
Tunisia	263	146	58	42	2.5	-28	
Algeria	90	22	23	19	1.1	-17	
Ukraine	6	4	7	17	1.0	143	
All Other	321	431	484	207	12	-57	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 550</b>	<b>2 287</b>	<b>2 621</b>	<b>1 680</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>- 36</b>	

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

## Annex Table 5. Facilitators

Detections reported at the external borders, by place of detection and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Place of Detection</b>							
<b>Place of Detection</b>							<b>Nationality</b>
Inland	4 912	4 657	5 775	7 024	46	22	Unknown (14%)
Not available	3 765	2 651	4 286	3 963	26	-7.5	Spain (16%)
Land	1 804	1 979	3 202	3 907	25	22	Ukraine (11%)
Sea	404	310	286	417	2.7	46	Syria (22%)
Air	104	78	77	125	0.8	62	Unknown (34%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>							
Unknown	488	704	937	1 212	7.9	29	
Ukraine	244	185	416	780	5.1	88	
Syria	460	485	631	777	5.0	23	
Romania	213	342	643	724	4.7	13	
Morocco	1 039	616	748	693	4.5	-7.4	
Spain	507	418	842	670	4.3	-20	
France	595	568	644	654	4.2	1.6	
Türkiye	403	299	519	653	4.2	26	
India	96	87	267	528	3.4	98	
Georgia	159	107	221	517	3.3	134	
All Other	6 785	5 864	7 758	8 228	53	6.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 989</b>	<b>9 675</b>	<b>13 626</b>	<b>15 436</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13</b>	

Note: Data are not available from Spain for December 2022.

## Annex Table 6. Illegal stay

Detections reported by place of detection, age group, gender and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Place of Detection</b>							<b>Nationality</b>
Inland	307 248	274 235	375 325	542 337	80	44	Syria (17%)
onExit	92 411	95 885	90 684	124 573	18	37	Moldova (26%)
Not available	3 419	4 395	2 710	7 381	1.1	172	Afghanistan (22%)
<b>Age Group</b>							<b>Nationality</b>
Adult	359 515	344 206	415 843	567 126	84	36	Syria (14%)
Minor	22 227	18 074	32 502	51 927	7.7	60	Afghanistan (33%)
Not available	21 336	12 235	20 374	55 238	8.2	171	Afghanistan (41%)
<b>Gender</b>							<b>Nationality</b>
Female	62 069	63 351	73 401	94 591	14	29	Ukraine (16%)
Male	247 782	243 250	316 031	475 015	70	50	Syria (17%)
Not available	93 227	67 914	79 287	104 685	16	32	Afghanistan (25%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>							
Syria	9 433	16 172	34 991	91 494	14	161	
Afghanistan	15 675	18 129	40 396	80 500	12	99	
Morocco	32 669	33 164	32 275	50 894	7.5	58	
Moldova	13 990	20 425	36 177	38 528	5.7	6.5	
Tunisia	8 281	9 328	10 687	37 253	5.5	249	
Ukraine	39 759	46 012	32 099	33 668	5.0	4.9	
India	7 090	4 203	5 859	33 241	4.9	467	
Algeria	21 409	22 647	33 320	31 972	4.7	-4.0	
Albania	24 994	21 940	25 892	27 469	4.1	6.1	
Türkiye	9 132	6 542	8 712	26 184	3.9	201	
All Other	220 646	175 953	208 311	223 088	33	7.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>403 078</b>	<b>374 515</b>	<b>468 719</b>	<b>674 291</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>44</b>	

Note: Data are not available from Latvia for April 2022, Cyprus and Finland for December 2022.

## Annex Table 7. Refusals of entry

Refusals of entry at the external borders reported by border type, age group, gender and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>							
Land	145 494	102 456	93 726	78 674	62	-16	Ukraine (34%)
Air	62 859	26 628	31 025	43 010	34	39	Albania (10%)
Sea	4 129	2 845	4 487	4 969	3.9	11	Albania (42%)
Not available	5	1	0	1	0.0	n.a.	Philippines (100%)
<b>Age Group</b>							
Adult	175 356	123 907	122 250	115 414	91	-5.6	Ukraine (23%)
Minor	19 411	5 030	3 547	5 626	4.4	59	Ukraine (33%)
Not available	17 720	2 993	3 441	5 614	4.4	63	Russia (58%)
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	53 271	30 740	29 502	32 043	25	8.6	Ukraine (39%)
Male	132 998	92 881	89 872	79 048	62	-12	Ukraine (20%)
Not available	26 218	8 309	9 864	15 563	12	58	Russia (22%)
<b>Top Ten nationalities</b>							
Ukraine	70 313	56 004	51 512	28 281	22	-45	
Albania	21 630	11 653	17 725	14 607	12	-18	
Russia	34 546	8 271	3 344	11 219	8.9	235	
Türkiye	4 767	3 140	4 124	6 973	5.5	69	
Serbia	7 198	6 321	7 274	5 585	4.4	-23	
Moldova	6 174	8 668	7 798	4 819	3.8	-38	
Georgia	5 154	1 900	2 831	4 371	3.5	54	
Belarus	7 691	5 514	2 820	4 272	3.4	51	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3 316	6 672	3 759	4 049	3.2	7.7	
Colombia	3 246	1 077	1 319	3 581	2.8	171	
All Other	48 452	22 710	26 732	38 897	31	46	
<b>Total</b>	<b>212 487</b>	<b>131 930</b>	<b>129 238</b>	<b>126 654</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-2</b>	

Data are not available from Switzerland for June 2022.

## Annex Table 8. Reasons for refusals of entry

Refusals of entry at the external borders reported by reasons for refusal and top ten nationalities

	Refusal persons Total	Reasons for refusals of entry (see description below)										Reasons Total
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	n.a.	
<b>Top Ten nationalities</b>												
Ukraine	28 281	2 678	22	6 265	17	5 826	8 207	1 532	3 034	3 093	114	30 788
Albania	14 607	123	51	323	9	4 902	2 193	836	5 554	1 056	233	15 280
Russia	11 219	78	42	3 044	158	1 949	88	234	162	6 770	54	12 579
Türkiye	6 973	443	152	4 073	49	1 181	508	353	259	106	121	7 245
Colombia	3 581	23	6	198	0	3 090	101	477	181	26	1 987	6 089
Serbia	5 585	163	76	309	4	1 072	1 959	215	1 600	274	6	5 678
Moldova	4 819	126	2	108	16	1 640	543	319	2 064	253	2	5 073
Georgia	4 371	57	14	211	10	1 180	298	283	1 807	236	586	4 682
Belarus	4 272	29	2	1 036	4	394	149	54	168	1 417	1 143	4 396
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4 049	115	9	136	0	2 786	231	288	487	139	5	4 196
All Other	38 897	3 576	910	14 056	554	10 956	1 893	1 876	2 688	2 351	5 143	44 003
<b>Total</b>	<b>126 654</b>	<b>7 411</b>	<b>1 286</b>	<b>29 759</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>34 976</b>	<b>16 170</b>	<b>6 467</b>	<b>18 004</b>	<b>15 721</b>	<b>9 394</b>	<b>140 009</b>

Descriptions of the reasons for refusal of entry:

- A** has no valid travel document(s);
- B** has a false/counterfeit/forged travel document;
- C** has no valid visa or residence permit;
- D** has a false/counterfeit/forged visa or residence permit;
- E** has no appropriate documentation justifying the purpose and conditions of stay;
- F** has already stayed for three months during a six months period on the territory of the Member States of the European Union;
- G** does not have sufficient means of subsistence in relation to the period and form of stay, or the means to return to the country of origin or transit;
- H** is a person for whom an alert has been issued for the purposes of refusing entry in the SIS or in the national register;
- I** is considered to be a threat for public policy, internal security, public health or the international relations of one or more Member States of the European Union;

## Annex Table 9. Persons using fraudulent documents

Detections on entry at the external borders, border type and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>							
Air	3 450	1 494	2 295	3 488	62	52	Türkiye (9%)
Land	1 085	2 079	4 828	2 056	37	-57	Ukraine (36%)
Sea	693	179	46	44	0.8	-4.3	Morocco (45%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>							
Ukraine	249	1 258	3 067	760	14	-75	
Russia	119	172	198	560	10	183	
Türkiye	402	265	350	509	9.1	45	
Iran	406	74	154	254	4.5	65	
India	65	17	86	238	4.3	177	
Unknown	244	210	205	232	4.2	13	
Syria	131	75	113	197	3.5	74	
Pakistan	85	14	25	174	3.1	596	
Georgia	20	64	257	153	2.7	-40	
Kosovo*	155	92	143	135	2.4	-5.6	
All Other	3 352	1 511	2 571	2 376	43	-7.6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 228</b>	<b>3 752</b>	<b>7 169</b>	<b>5 588</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-22</b>	

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

## Annex Table 10. Fraudulent documents used

Detections on entry at the external borders, by country of issuance of the document and type of document

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Country of issuance</b>							<b>Type of Document</b>
Poland	286	1 455	3 121	1 283	16	-59	Other (82%)
Ukraine	46	97	723	652	7.9	-9.8	Other (92%)
Germany	439	260	365	586	7.1	61	Visa (56%)
France	720	377	451	576	7.0	28	Visa (26%)
Spain	895	324	314	543	6.6	73	Visa (29%)
Italy	616	217	400	523	6.3	31	Visa (34%)
Belgium	186	144	231	439	5.3	90	Residence Permit (61%)
Greece	192	131	147	250	3.0	70	Visa (33%)
Hungary	101	169	329	176	2.1	-47	Border Stamp (78%)
Russia	16	16	50	160	1.9	220	Border Stamp (63%)
All Other	3 103	1 586	2 572	3 074	37	20	Passport (44%)
<b>Type of Document</b>							<b>Type of Fraud</b>
Other	164	1 551	4 601	2 248	27	-51	Counterfeit (96%)
Passport	2 691	1 006	1 294	1 822	22	41	Impostor (28%)
Visa	1 150	456	700	1 422	17	103	Fraudulently obtained (51%)
Border Stamp	699	740	963	1 242	15	29	Counterfeit (94%)
Residence Permit	855	530	668	1 014	12	52	Counterfeit (78%)
ID Card	1 041	493	477	514	6.2	7.8	Counterfeit (67%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 600</b>	<b>4 776</b>	<b>8 703</b>	<b>8 262</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-5.1</b>	

### Annex Table 11. Return decisions issued

Decisions issued by age group, gender and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Age Group</b>							
Adult	154 894	257 455	265 816	272 634	53	3	Afghanistan (7%)
Not available	137 388	147 711	188 106	221 305	43	18	Algeria (16%)
Minor	9 741	20 422	18 744	21 242	4	13	Iraq (13%)
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	204 824	258 928	273 304	280 761	54	3	Morocco (9%)
Not available	47 461	102 431	133 217	174 921	34	31	Algeria (16%)
Female	49 738	64 229	66 145	59 499	12	-10	Iraq (6%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>							
Algeria	12 727	35 804	42 870	44 471	9	4	
Morocco	23 553	34 070	34 633	39 163	8	13	
Tunisia	4 355	15 684	15 242	29 594	6	94	
Pakistan	17 086	24 705	22 658	27 161	5	20	
Albania	17 272	24 037	29 610	25 858	5	-13	
Afghanistan	18 516	26 837	19 098	25 351	5	33	
Georgia	7 108	8 324	12 356	20 520	4	66	
Bangladesh	6 210	11 262	14 979	20 189	4	35	
Turkey	7 553	13 500	12 393	16 990	3	37	
India	5 139	6 691	9 830	15 650	3	59	
All Other	182 504	224 674	258 997	250 234	49	-3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>302 023</b>	<b>425 588</b>	<b>472 666</b>	<b>515 181</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>9</b>	

Note: Data are not available from the Netherlands since August 2022 and from Romania for November–December 2022.

## Annex Table 12. Effective returns

People effectively returned to third countries by age group, gender and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Age Group</b>							<b>Nationality</b>
Adult	96 053	56 161	61 332	64 006	75	4	Albania (13%)
Minor	5 411	5 375	5 533	6 750	8	22	North Macedonia (17%)
Not available	37 913	10 962	17 515	15 005	17	-14	Albania (16%)
<b>Gender</b>							<b>Nationality</b>
Female	21 374	16 339	18 054	17 563	20	-3	Georgia (12%)
Male	75 211	52 853	59 289	58 726	68	-1	Albania (13%)
Not available	42 792	3 306	7 037	9 472	11	35	Albania (23%)
<b>Top Ten Nationalities</b>							
Albania	15 629	7 935	10 516	11 266	13	7	
Georgia	7 344	4 774	6 042	7 983	9	32	
Turkey	2 887	2 024	2 810	4 210	5	50	
Serbia	3 261	3 382	3 478	3 866	5	11	
Tunisia	3 564	2 860	2 867	3 458	4	21	
North Macedonia	1 941	1 703	1 847	3 434	4	86	
Moldova	4 027	2 579	2 913	3 051	4	5	
Morocco	2 780	2 780	2 621	2 850	3	9	
Algeria	5 190	1 576	903	2 837	3	214	
Russia	4 820	2 268	2 406	2 374	3	-1	
All Other	87 934	40 617	47 977	40 432	47	-16	
<b>Total</b>	<b>139 377</b>	<b>72 498</b>	<b>84 380</b>	<b>85 761</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>	

Note: Data are not available from Belgium and Romania for November-December 2022 and from the Netherlands since August 2022.

Annex Table 13. **Effective returns by type of return**

People effectively returned to third countries by type of return and top ten nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>TYPE OF RETURN</b>							
<b>Forced return</b>	<b>71 672</b>	<b>27 700</b>	<b>32 624</b>	<b>35 095</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Albania (18%)</b>
Not applicable	n.app.	27 700	32 624	35 095	100	8	Albania (18%)
Enforced by Member State	50 614	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Not available	17 218	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Enforced by Joint Operation	3 840	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Voluntary return</b>	<b>67 656</b>	<b>43 466</b>	<b>50 025</b>	<b>48 741</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>Georgia (11%)</b>
Without assistance	34 342	29 929	30 688	30 271	35	-1	Georgia (7%)
Not applicable	n.app.	13 537	19 337	18 470	22	-4	Georgia (16%)
IOM Assisted	22	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Not available	22 223	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Others	4 758	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
AVRR	4 179	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
AVR	2 132	n.app.	n.app.	n.app.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Not available</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>1 332</b>	<b>1 731</b>	<b>1 925</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Albania (21%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>139 377</b>	<b>72 498</b>	<b>84 380</b>	<b>85 761</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>TOP TEN NATIONALITIES</b>							
<b>Forced</b>							
Albania	12 505	4 801	6 858	6 404	18	-7	
Tunisia	3 347	2 503	2 553	3 070	9	20	
Georgia	3 514	1 703	2 311	2 598	7	12	
Turkey	1 342	981	1 629	2 424	7	49	
Morocco	9 074	2 276	1 895	2 194	6	16	
Algeria	4 579	1 290	531	1 858	5	250	
Serbia	2 126	1 470	1 509	1 693	5	12	
Moldova	1 848	1 072	1 435	1 170	3	-18	
Kosovo*	1 278	730	1 025	1 037	3	1	
North Macedonia	1 198	603	553	1 007	3	82	
All Other	30 861	10 271	12 325	11 640	33	-6	
<b>Total Forced Returns</b>	<b>71 672</b>	<b>27 700</b>	<b>32 624</b>	<b>35 095</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Voluntary</b>							
Georgia	3 824	3 000	3 559	5 188	11	46	
Albania	3 095	2 771	3 298	4 458	9	35	
North Macedonia	739	1 036	1 211	2 337	5	93	
Russia	3 040	1 733	1 769	2 123	4	20	
Serbia	1 135	1 769	1 850	2 069	4	12	
Moldova	2 179	1 496	1 448	1 859	4	28	
Turkey	1 544	997	1 110	1 730	4	56	
Ukraine	24 052	9 537	8 184	1 712	4	-79	
Iraq	2 667	1 405	1 682	1 630	3	-3	
Belarus	2 275	987	968	1 552	3	60	
All Other	23 106	18 735	24 946	24 083	50	-12	
<b>Total Voluntary Returns</b>	<b>67 656</b>	<b>43 466</b>	<b>50 025</b>	<b>48 741</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-3</b>	

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

## Annex Table 14. Passenger flow on entry

Data reported (on voluntary basis) by border type and groups of nationalities

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of total	% change on prev. year	Highest share
<b>Border Type</b>							
Air	183 234 297	46 185 988	62 376 366	154 944 259	60	148	Unknown (32%)
Land	104 334 084	45 876 231	49 039 117	90 103 672	35	84	Unknown (20%)
Sea	16 752 610	2 609 813	3 530 344	11 189 417	4.4	217	Unknown (44%)
<b>Groups of nationalities</b>							
EU MS/SAC	89 644 947	32 515 192	49 725 805	100 820 739	39	103	
Third-country	74 123 935	22 584 970	31 319 501	83 466 897	33	165	
Not specified	140 552 109	39 571 870	33 900 521	71 949 712	28	112	
<b>Total</b>	<b>304 320 991</b>	<b>94 672 032</b>	<b>114 945 827</b>	<b>256 237 348</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>122</b>	

Not reported Member States:

Air: Austria, Ireland, Portugal

Land: Ireland

Sea: Cyprus, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden

Missing data: Latvia (April 2022), Malta (December 2021)

Notes: Spain and Sweden reports data since January 2021 at air, the Netherlands started to report data since Spetember 2022.

## Notes on FRAN data sources and methods

The term 'Member States' refers to FRAN Member States, which includes the 27 Member States and three Schengen Associated Countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). For the data concerning detections at the external borders of the EU, some of the border types are not applicable to all FRAN Member States. This pertains to data on all FRAN indicators since the data are provided disaggregated by border type. The definitions of detections at land borders are therefore not applicable (excluding borders with non-Schengen principalities) for the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. For Cyprus, reported detections along the Green Line are linked to arrivals of migrants by sea or air in the areas where the Government of the Republic

of Cyprus does not exercise effective control. The Green Line does not constitute an external border of the EU according to Council Regulation EC No. 866/2004. For sea borders, the definitions are not applicable for land-locked Member States including Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Switzerland.

In addition, data on detections of illegal border-crossing at land, air and sea BCPs (1B) are not available for Austria, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland.

Data on detections of illegal border-crossing between sea BCPs (1A) are not available for Iceland and Ireland. For 2013, data from Slovenia include detections at the EU external borders only until June 2013.

Data on apprehension (FRAN Indicator 2) of facilitators are not available for Ireland. Data for Italy and Norway also include the facilitation of illegal stay and work. For Romania, the data include land Intra-EU detections on exit at the border with Hungary.

Data on refusals of entry (FRAN Indicator 4) at the external EU borders are not disaggregated by reason of refusal for Ireland.

The data on passenger flow are not available for Austria, Ireland and Portugal. Data at the sea border are not available for Cyprus, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden.

For all indicators, data from Croatia are available only starting with July 2013.

**FRONT****X**

Plac Europejski 6  
00-844 Warsaw, Poland

T +48 22 205 95 00  
F +48 22 205 95 01

[frontex@frontex.europa.eu](mailto:frontex@frontex.europa.eu)  
[www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu)

Print:  
TT-AC-23-002-EN-C  
ISBN 978-92-9467-894-2  
ISSN 1977-4451  
[doi.10.2819/62842](https://doi.org/10.2819/62842)

PDF:  
TT-AC-23-002-EN-N  
ISBN 978-92-9467-893-5  
ISSN 1977-446X  
[doi.10.2819/920282](https://doi.org/10.2819/920282)

FPI 23.5017